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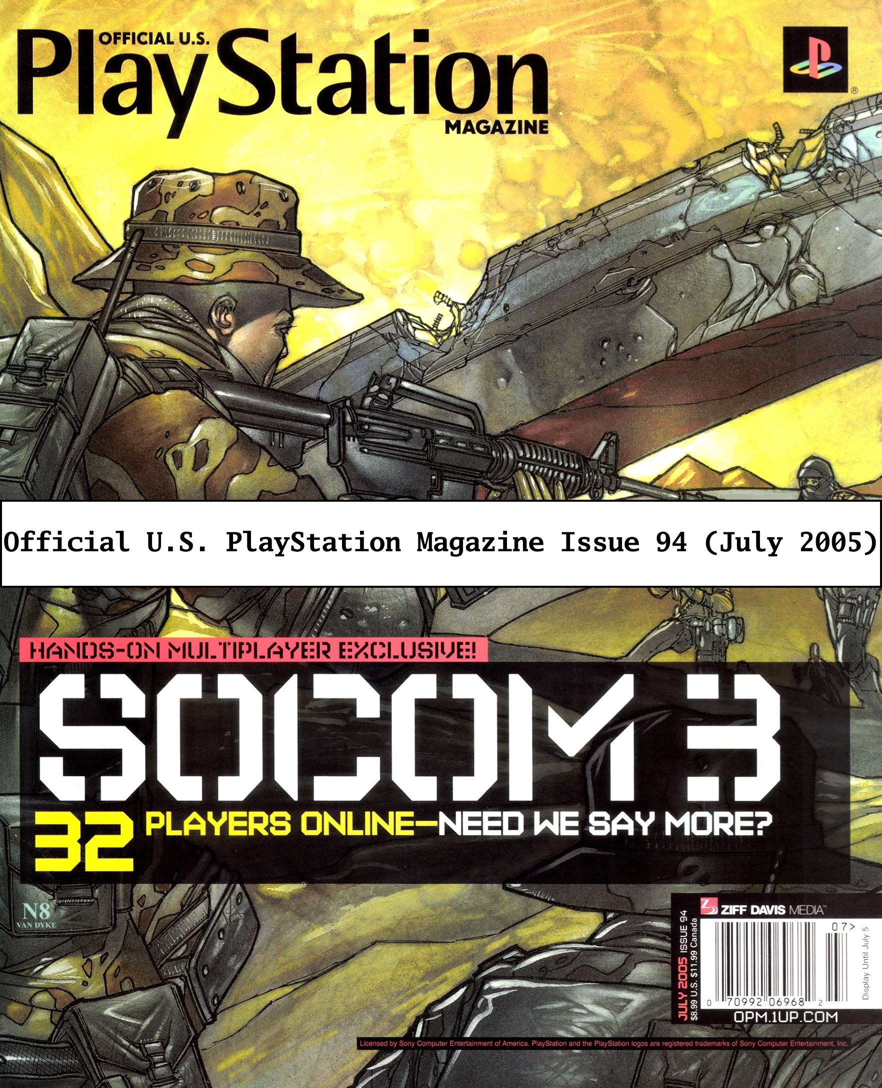
PlayStation
MAGAZINE



Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 94 (July 2005)

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SOCOM 3

32 PLAYERS ONLINE—NEED WE SAY MORE?

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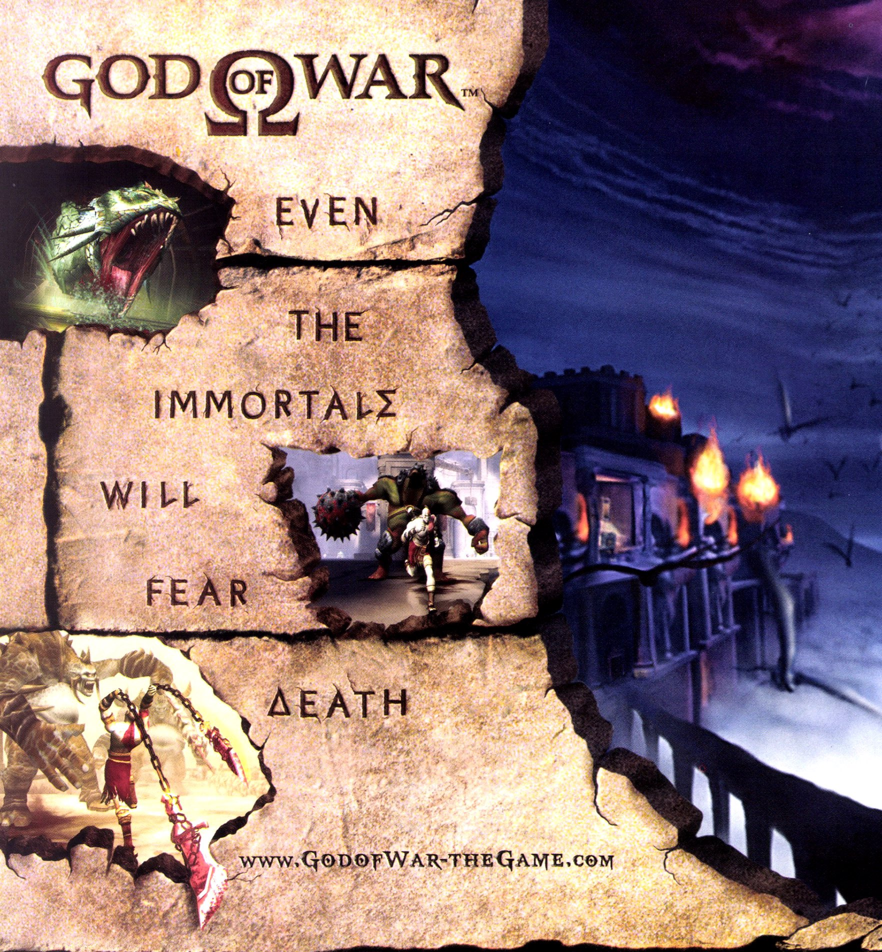
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Nudity
Sexual Themes
Strong Language

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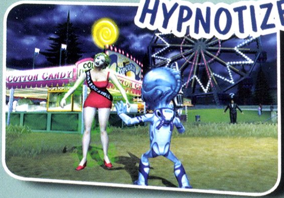

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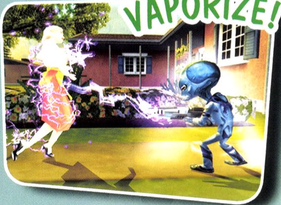

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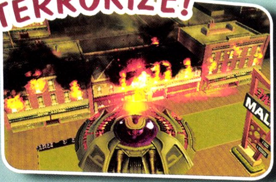

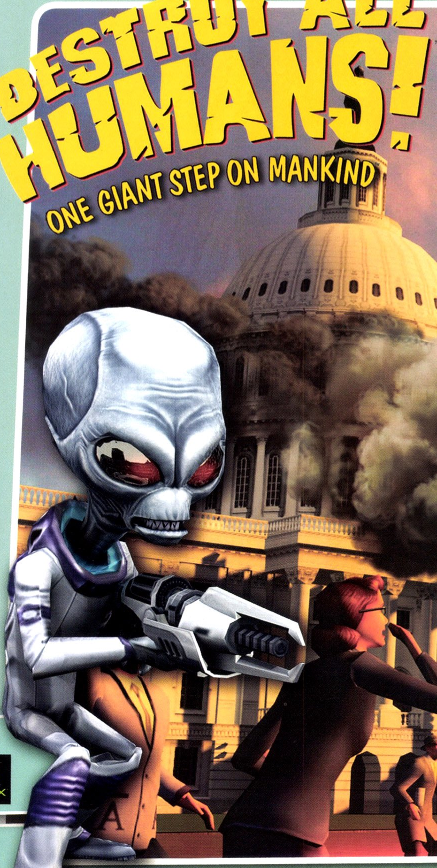

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XBOX

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Sexual Themes
Violence

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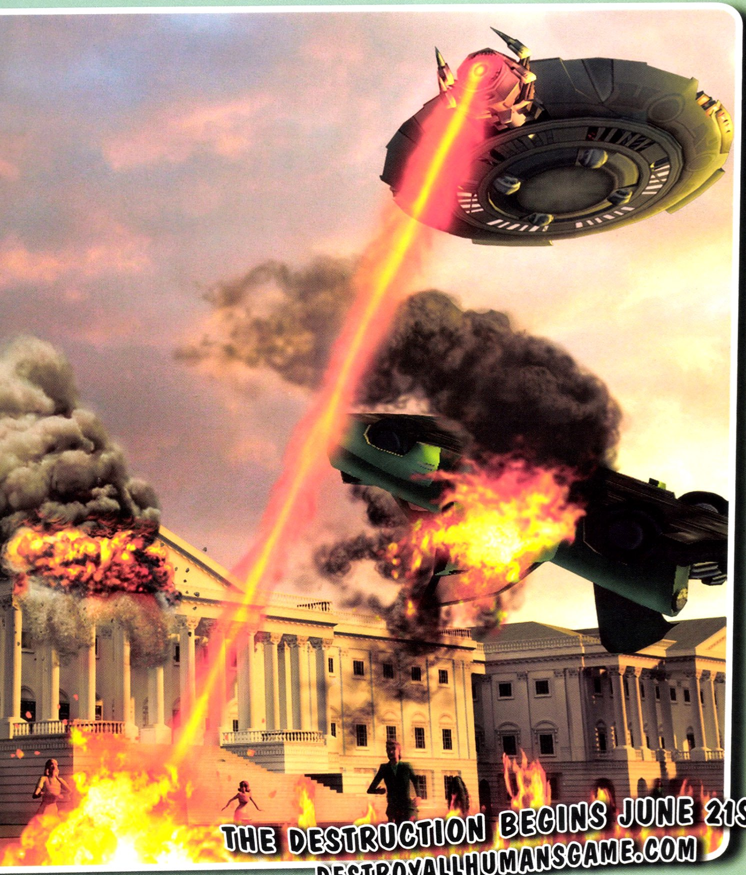
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EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK!
SOCOM 3
WE SCORED HANDS-ON MULTIPLAYER TIME WITH SONY'S NEWEST COMBAT-ACTION GAME—FULL REPORT INSIDE!

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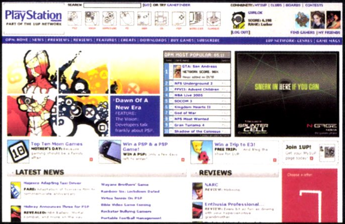

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Games come in many flavors, not all of which we talk about here in the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*. For an even more comprehensive look at the digital entertainment you love, pay 1UP.com a visit.

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When will *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition* finally be coming out on PSP? How exactly can you transfer your comic books to a Memory Stick? Does putting your PSP in the microwave fix dead pixels? For answers to these burning questions and more, go to psp.1UP.com.

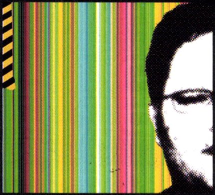
PS2.1UP.COM
Ratchet 4, Dragon Quest VIII, Prince of Persia 3, Sly 3, Burnout 4, Madden 16—there are a lot of big sequels headed to your PlayStation 2 this year. To get all the latest information, head on over to ps2.1UP.com.

BOARDS.1UP.COM
Sam Levenson once said, "It's so simple to be wise. Just think of something stupid to say and then don't say it." If you go to boards.1UP.com, you can find a lot of people who choose not to follow that advice.

CLUBS.1UP.COM
This month we're having a contest to see who can think up the most bizarre and insane club *ever*! How to enter: Create the club and then invite Scooter to join. The winner will receive a slightly used ham sandwich.

SHOW US THE ONLINE!

THE PS3 NEEDS TO SHOW UP AND SHUT DOWN XBOX LIVE



Here's a truth: The PS2 outshines Microsoft's Xbox in every category but one: online. In the current generation of consoles, Xbox Live is the "killer app" that, once improved and applied to Microsoft's next-generation console (the Xbox 360), could make the company a genuine threat to Sony's longtime videogame dominance.

Which is why Sony needs an online strategy for the PS3 that will devastate Xbox Live. And by devastate, I mean absolutely *crush* it. We know the PS3 will make rival consoles obsolete, and we know that an online component is in the works for Sony's new machine. But how about one that elicits a pained and confused look of shock from Microsoft? One that maybe even turns the XBL faithful against the Redmond Giant? Sony, surprise us, please!

In the meantime, Zipper Interactive is here to ensure that the PS2 has ample online goodness. I mean, 32 players—whodathunk? Catch all the details in Joe's excellent and thorough *SOCOM 3* feature, beginning on page 60. « *Tom Byron*

THE OPM FAMILY

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DANA JONGEWAARD is very excited about *Black* after getting to play it this month, but the experience left her with a bit of a quandary—Uzi or shotgun? After trying them out by riddling her fellow editors with cascades of bullets, she came to an obvious conclusion: both.

JOE RYBICKI really enjoyed learning all about *SOCOM 3*'s online play this month. He especially got into the whole weapon-customization thing. Personally, we think he may have gone a little bit overboard when he started trying to tape Giancarlo's face to the side of the barrel.

THIERRY NGUYEN loved writing and editing the RPG feature so much that he was inspired to audition for a role he believes he's meant to play: "Security Guard #1138" in the upcoming *Die Hard 4* film. His last words upon leaving the office were: "Good-bye gaming, hello Hollywood!"

GIANCARLO VARANINI often wonders what would happen if Chewbacca was in a Jacuzzi and his hair got caught in one of the jets. Would anyone even understand him when he tried to place a call to 911 explaining that he's stuck in a hot tub?

LOGAN PARR has decided he really loves his TV. It allowed him to fully appreciate the awesomeness of *God of War*. Now that he is finished with the game, he is left asking, "Is there really life after *God of War*?" Don't know what he is talking about? Check out this month's demo!

RYAN VULK auctioned off rare *Star Wars* memorabilia via eBay and is now spending his hard-earned Internet monies to acquire the original Mustang from *Goldfinger*. Alas, he was saddened to learn that its driver, model/sniper Tania Mallet, is not part of the standard package!

ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA has decided to collect taxidermied animals and skeletons to decorate his home. This does not come as a surprise—a few days ago, he was arrested for impersonating a morgue attendant at a local hospital. Donations for bail are welcome.

ZOE FLOWER ran the danger of missing her flight to E3 because she couldn't decide which shoes to bring. Then she realized she was going to be spending three days surrounded by dudes clad in free gaming T-shirts. Sometimes it's hard work doing a woman's job in a man's world.

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine (ISSN #1094-6683) is published monthly by Ziff Davis Media Inc., 28 East 28th Street, New York, NY 10016. Periodicals Postage Paid at New York, NY 10016 and additional mailing offices. Ride Along enclosed in all U.S. copies. Single-issue rate: $8.99. Subscription Rates: One Year (12 issues and 12 demo discs) $49.97 U.S., $65.97 all other countries. Ride along enclosed. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine, P.O. Box 55362, Boulder, CO 80322-5362. For Subscription Service Inquiries call us at 800-627-6458 U.S. and Canada, or 303-604-7445 all other countries. Fax us at 850-683-4094 U.S. and Canada, or 303-604-0518 all other countries, or visit our subscription website at service.playstationmagazine.com. Back Issues: Back issues are $8 each in the US, $10 each elsewhere (subject to availability). Prepayment is required. Make checks payable to Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine. Mail your requests to: Back Issues, Ziff Davis Media Inc., P.O. Box 53131, Boulder, CO 80322-3131. Mailing lists: We sometimes make lists of our customers available to mailers of goods and services that may interest you. If you do not wish to receive their mailings, please write to us at: Official U.S. Playstation Magazine, P.O. Box 55362, Boulder, CO 80322-5362.

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The Canadian GST registration number is 14049 6720 RT. Publications Mail Agreement No. 40009221. Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to PO Box 503, RPO West Beaver Creek, Richmond Hill, ON L4B 4R6. Printed in the USA.

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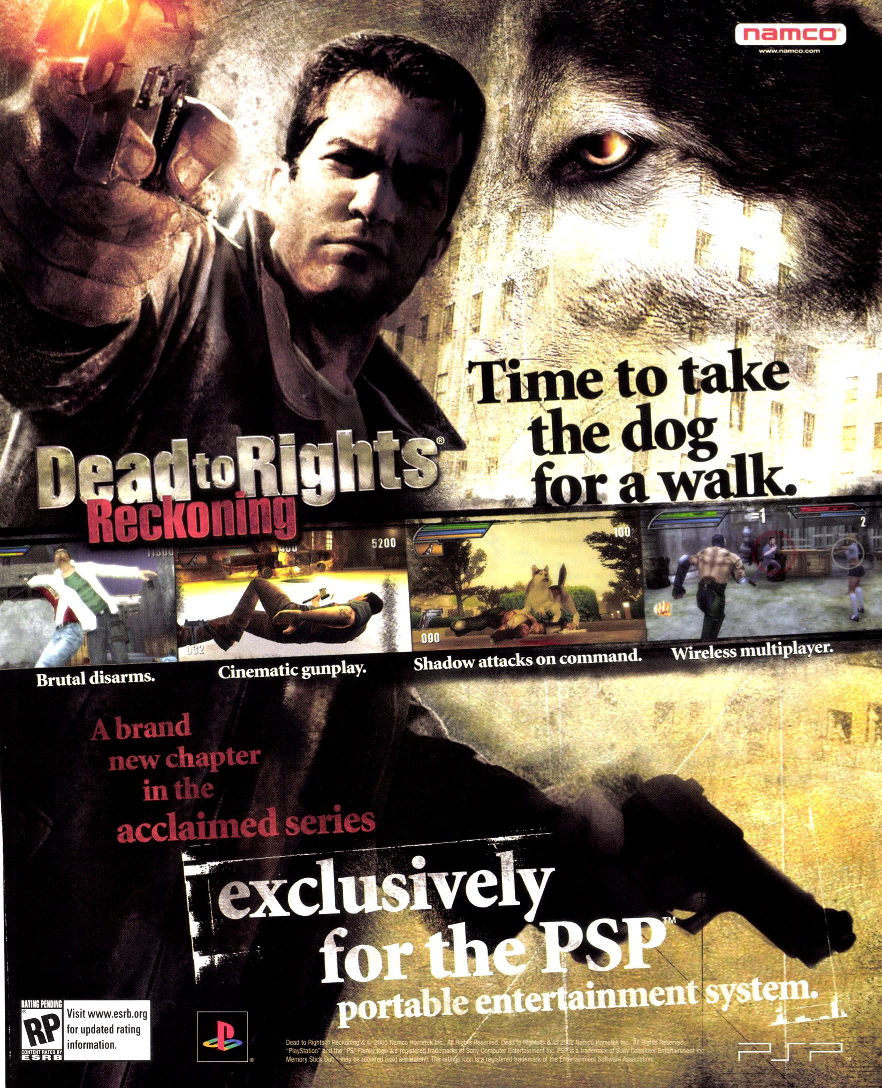
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ON THE DVD

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It's another circle of goodness to slip into your PS2's tray. Hunker down in front of your television and ignore your mother's insistent commands that you go outside—who needs sunlight and fresh air? Not us, not you.

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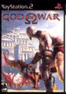
PLAY IT

ALSO CHECK OUT
You can try two of this month's essential RPGs with the demo classics *Arc the Lad* and *Final Fantasy X-2*.



GOD OF WAR

If you think for some reason we might have been lying when we called this one of the best games ever, play the demo and discover how wrong you are.

MLB 2006

It's fun to make Jeter cry, even if it's just a simulation. But little did we know that we didn't have to trade all the Yankees' star players away for them to suck.

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

Oh those gundams and their crazy mobile suits. If we had mobile suits, we wouldn't have to ride on the bus next to crazy men who talks to themselves.

FLATOUT

The world really needs more racing games that bring in a nice sense of red—not the color red, but the lifestyle red. Thank goodness for *FlatOut*.

WATCH IT

CUT IT OUT
Explore the wonders of the wireless generation with a mind-bending video demo of Logitech's controller.

KILLER 7

From the mind of the man who birthed *Resident Evil 4* comes something even more messed up. But it looks cool, and to the kids, isn't that what matters?

FANTASTIC FOUR

While the phrase "Fantastic Four" might bring to your mind some combination of *OPM* editors, you'll have to make do with a digital Jessica Alba instead.

TWISTED METAL: HEAD-ON

We like being able to shoot rockets at cars while actually riding in a car, but our mothers told us to stop damaging property and play our PSPs instead.

MAKAI KINGDOM

This game has a chick whose hair is constantly on fire and penguins that walk around carrying balloons. How could it not be the best game ever?

TMNT2: BATTLE NEXUS

Be honest now—you've been sitting by your PS2, head in your hands, wishing you could have everything unlocked in *TMNT2*. Now you can.

RUMBLE ROSES

What's better than sassy ladies performing wrestling moves on each other? Having your choice of any sassy lady you want to perform said moves.

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Xbox® screenshots shown

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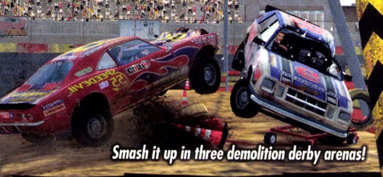
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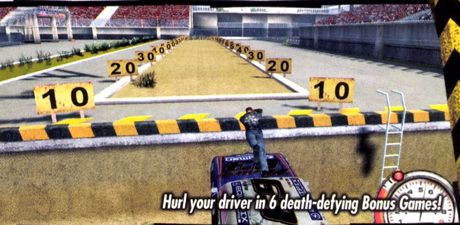
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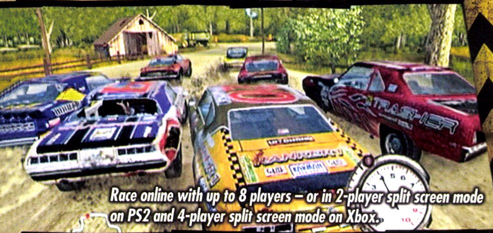
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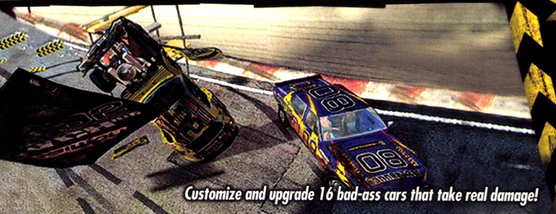
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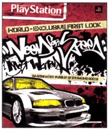

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Game publishers are cutting off their nose to spite their face by increasing the difficulty of games to a large degree. My wife and I are both professionals and gamers with plenty of disposable income, and a large portion of our entertainment budget is dedicated to games. I have been gaming for two-and-a-half decades, and my wife has been gaming for a decade, so neither of us are Johnny-come-latelies. Our tastes range across most genres, and we have all the current home consoles. We don't rent games, since the chance of us getting to them during the rental period is slim to none. In short, we are the target demographic for the publishers.

We play games to relax and have fun—that is our sole goal. Increasing the difficulty meaninglessly destroys the fun. There is little point in buying a game that doesn't promise fun. I am getting fairly displeased with [the difficult] portions of *God of War,* and it is making me rethink purchasing any game when it comes out, regardless of any positive press. I have no plans to purchase *Devil May Cry 3* at retail and will probably wait until I can get it for less than $10, new or used.

Rob Myers
via e-mail

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ADVERSE TO ADS

The videogame industry needs to hire the right people to give the word to the masses. Seriously, what is it with the crappy and completely out-of-focus videogame commercials? [For example, recently] I was watching that *Donkey Kong* commercial for the GameCube game—less than half of it shows actual in-game content. Then we have the *Doom 3* commercial for Xbox [that] actually doesn't make sense at all. I have yet to discover the relation between people proclaiming doom in a busy street of New York and the scary environments of *Doom 3*. It is obvious that [game publishers] are hiring the wrong kinds of people, people who should work on perfume and beer TV commercials. It is OK to have some creativity, but not when it interferes with the actual content of the game. Though, I must admit, there are [some] good videogame commercials, like most of the ones made for PlayStation 2 games. The *Ratchet & Clank* commercials could almost be called classics.

I just hope that these so-called videogame advertisements don't turn out to get the same fate as videogame-based Hollywood movies. That would really be a disaster.

Cesar Herrera
via e-mail

GAMERS ARE TALKING ABOUT

STRAIGHT FROM THE OPM MESSAGE BOARDS

READY FOR THE BLITZ?

Now that the EA/NFL deal has been hyper-analyzed by message board folk, people have started talking about alternatives, such as Midway's *Blitz*:

looksocool quips, "EA essentially put themselves into the cookie cutter. It's up to other developers to explore the envelope now. I'd actually play a football game that has backstory, rivalries, and weapons. That's so much more interesting than updated stadiums and rosters."

Botkiller chimes in, "Of all the non-NFL/non-NCAA football games, I think this one has the best chance at being good."

hunterlords, some sort of über-EA lover, dares to provoke the crowd by saying, "This game will suck [...], like everybody on this post. EA will rule the world, and there is nothing that you can't do about it. Screw all of you EA BASHERS!" He was squelched soon after.

LEGENDS OF BURNOUT

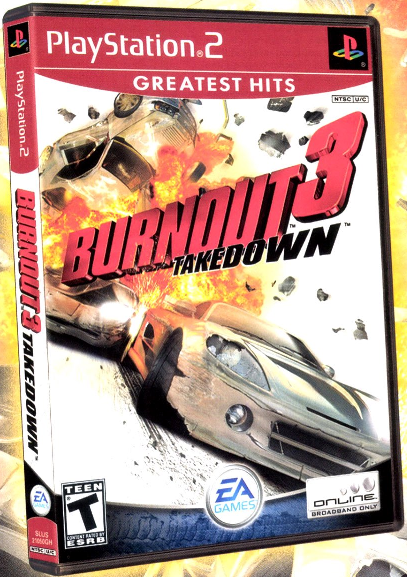
During a free moment from being angry at Scooter for making up an Iron Man game (scope his blog), **Arsenalgear4079** asks, "Anyone else psyched [for *Burnout Legends*]? Although I'm not an EA fan in any way, this is definitely gonna be one of the few EA games I'll buy (just like *Burnout 3*). I hated all racing games in all forms until I played *Burnout 3*. Now I hate all racing games in all forms except for *Burnout 3*! So now I'll be able to play it on the road; I really can't think of anything better than that."

"In all honesty, I'm pretty unexcited about both *Burnout Legends* and *4*. I'm all for the idea behind the *Legends* game, bringing back classic tracks and all, but did they really have to give it the *Burnout 4* treatment? The colors and feel of *Burnout 4* are precisely the [types of] changes that are making me not care about it. Making classic tracks with those blah colors will just ruin it," replies **iRSven**.

SpideyBuddy adds to iRSven's point with this thought: "*NFS: Most Wanted* has that same graphical style, it seems, and I'm not sure why they're so intent on pushing it. Washed-out graphics aren't really that impressive or realistic (which they said they're not aiming for). And who isn't doing a 'gritty' atmosphere these days? I say bring on the saturated colors of arcade racing!"

Xanthus179 positively replies, "I'll probably pick this one up anyway, although I'm hoping that EA has toned down the rubber-band AI a bit. Also, if they tossed in infrastructure play as well, that would sell me immediately."

THE GAME THAT SMOKED THE COMPETITION



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CORRECTION

None needed! We invited the magazine gnomes into a room full of bagels, except there were no bagels—just plates full of death! We think we got all of them this time, but you never know....

Well, at Ad University, they like the idea of customers remembering the brand name rather than the features of the product itself. For example, you remember that *Doom 3* is on the Xbox, despite the fact that the commercial is about shrieking New Yorkers. This is similar to how we know about the Burger King Tender Crisp Bacon Cheddar Ranch because Hootie sans the Blowfish sang about it.

GLEN OR GLENDA?

I was looking over the *God of War* review in your May issue and noticed something that I thought was inaccurate. In the Gender Bender sidebar, it mentions that Linda Hunt was the only person ever to win an Oscar for playing someone of the opposite sex, which isn't entirely true. Hilary Swank also won an Oscar for playing a man (and a woman) in *Boys Don't Cry*.

Clint Panagopka
via e-mail

But you kind of self-pwn yourself right there, Clint, as you point out that Swank was portraying a woman pretending to be a man, while Linda Hunt was playing a dude who was a dude. Roles such as Swank's in *Boys Don't Cry* and Dustin Hoffman's in *Tootsie* were about characters pretending to be the opposite gender, while Linda's character was a man through and through.

DIGITAL CLINT ACHIEVED!

In your June 2005 letters section, you opine that you "fully endorse the idea of a game based on [the Clint Eastwood movie *Firefox*]." Well, good news! The game was released 21 years ago! At the height of mid-'80s laserdisc-game mania, Atari released its (apparently only) laserdisc-based title, *Firefox*. I happen to know this because I remember playing it. It was similar in a way to another laserdisc flying game, *MACH 3*, in that both had sprite-based planes flying over video landscapes streamed from the disc.

If I'm not mistaken, I encountered it at the arcade in Circus Circus in Reno. I would have been about 9 or 10 years old. [My parents] would drop me off at the arcade while they went off to gamble away my college tuition. I realize I should be bitter about this, but I'm not, because somehow Circus Circus consistently had some of the most obscure games of the time, and that in turn enables me to write pedantic letters like this one, and really, isn't that more valuable than what passes for higher education these days?

Steven Frank
via e-mail

Truly. Note that even though we're a bunch of fancy college lads (and lass), we pull out obscure references about Michael J. Fox movies and reality shows rather than use our non–Ivy League edumacation. It's the way of the world, kids. College is for engineers and people who enjoy bunk. Jokes about Martin Short and old videogames are where it's at!

GOOD GOD! KIDS READ THIS MAG!

I love *God of War*. I was telling my wife about the sex minigame in which you attempt to rock the vase off the stand in order to collect orbs. She said: "Ah, an orbgasm."

Galen McCown
via e-mail

DOUBLE-BURGLED!!

Just minutes ago I opened up the June issue of *OPM*, and in the very first section of letters, I saw a letter titled "Burgled!" I was curious, and as I read it, I couldn't help but laugh—not out of cruelty, but out of shocked surprise. Last summer the same situation happened to me when my family went on vacation. The van we travel in has a small television installed in it that I can play my PS2 on, which I often do on longer trips. Unfortunately, when we got home, I left it uncovered one night, and someone in the family left the car unlocked when going out to unpack the cooler. The next morning, the PS2 and all my games were gone, but the GameCube (which was lying out on the floor next to the PS2 but not plugged in) was still there. Is there a GameCube-hating, PS2-loving crime spree going on?

Freefur
via e-mail

Apparently console thieves aren't 8-year-olds, as the GameCube is for babies! Or emotionally stunted adults like Scooter. «

ASK US ANYTHING
AND WE'LL ANSWER

COUCHEZ AVEC MOI CE SOIR!

Q Because I speak French (as proof, just check out my name, which I bet you can't pronounce correctly!), I find it interesting that you sometimes use some French words or expressions, and I would like to know if there is anybody on your staff who speaks French.

Arnaud
vie e-mail

A Nous parlon francais terrible.

OPM REAL BIG

Q Are you guys going to do something big on the cover of your 100th issue?

Some guy who text-messaged us from his phone
via e-mail

A You bet. Our cover for Issue #100 is going to be bigger than that really big ball of twine in Minnesota. In fact, it's so damn big that it's getting its own zip code (86753). Lucky for us, the Postmaster General is a fan of *OPM*.

OH YOU DAMN GNOMES

Q Your review on page 98 of *NBA* for PSP shows pictures of *NBA Street Showdown* PSP instead of *NBA* made by 989. Do I get a prize?

Aaron Pak
via e-mail

A Whoops, it seems like one of the gnomes that we thought we killed in the correction box somehow survived the Bagel Room of Death and switched screenshots on us. Your prize is a certificate that reads, "Gnome Spotter Supreme."

PSP AIN'T ALL THAT

Q After reading the articles about the PSP, I wanted to ask *OPM* a question: What is so great about the PSP!?!?!?!

Herold Spencer
via e-mail

A Well, it has its own screen, so you can play *Lumines* while someone hogs the television to watch *Riding the Bus With My Sister*. That, and the whole "portable" thing is pretty good when you're on the bus or on an airplane.

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BLOG OF THE MONTH

"I just received a notice from my health benefits provider today about new 'will preparation services.' How grim is that to get first thing in the morning? More importantly: I don't know anyone who'd want all my gaming stuff. My mother would be sad to be stuck with all of it....

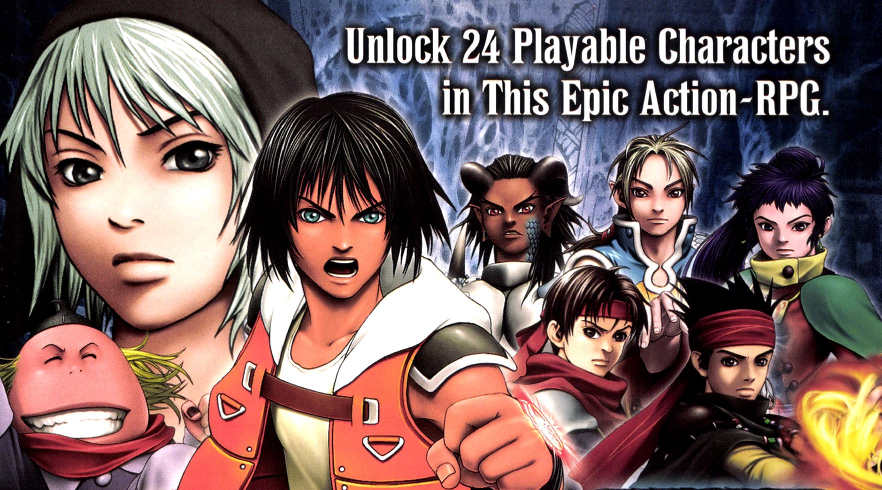
It's morbid but it could happen at any time, I suppose. One minute you are gaining an extra life...the next [is] 'game over.' No, for REAL this time. If I were to drop over dead playing any game, it would probably have to be *Ms. Pac-Man*. Better yet...*Buccaneer*. That was the first game I ever remember playing, and it should be fitting to go out as I came in. As for earthly possessions, I don't think I'll mind who my belongings go to. You really cannot take them with you. Some people seem to lose sight of that."

Amy McDonough
AlucardnoKoibito.1UP.com

CLUB OF THE MONTH

"Every Friday a new contest begins, a new pic will be uploaded, and a winner will be chosen. So have fun and be creative with the captions! Submit as many as you want."

Beat This Caption! Club
beatthiscaption-club.1up.com



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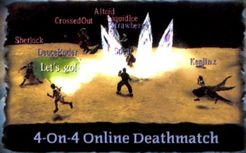

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LiquidIce
Strawberry
Sherlock
DeuceRnder
Let's go!
Spear
Kenjinx

4-On-4 Online Deathmatch

Strawberry
31
Spear

4-Player Online Co-op

Arc The Lad
End of Darkness™

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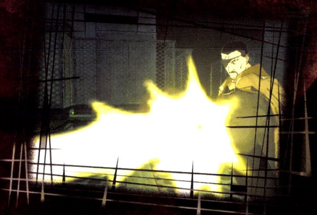

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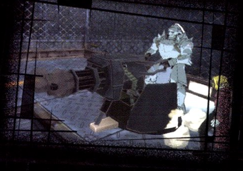

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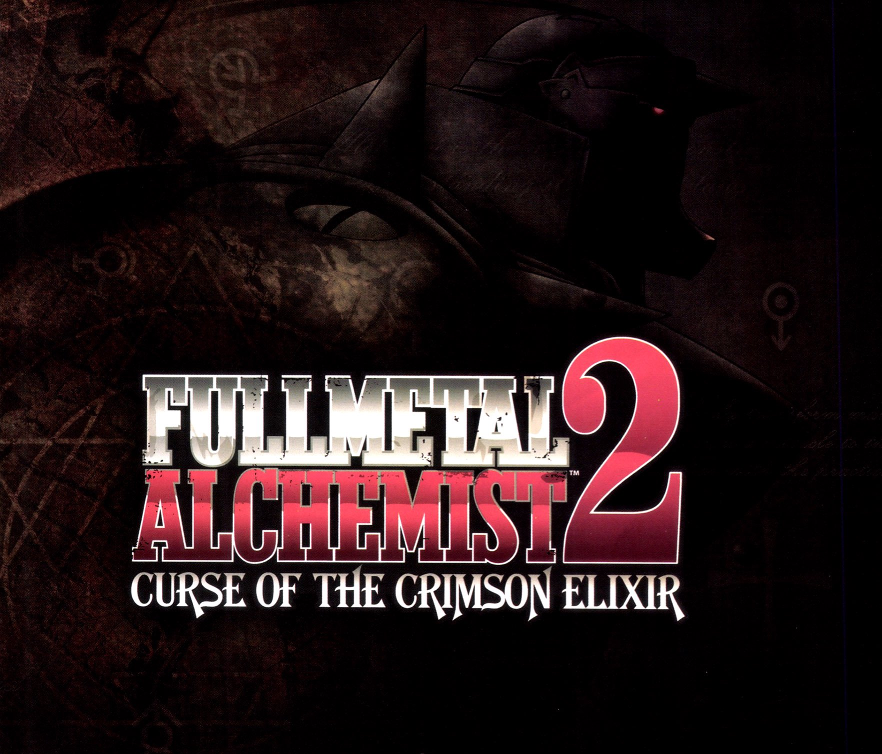

FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST™ 2

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Blood
Language
Use of Alcohol and Tobacco
Violence

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PlayStation®2

HYPE

38>

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INSIDE

26 **BLACK**
Like *Burnout*, but with guns instead of cars.

32 **EVERYBODY LOVES KATAMARI**
Don't pretend you don't.

34 **GUITAR HERO**
All you need are two words: guitar controller.

52 **THE WATCHDOG**
Videogames still don't matter nearly as much as movies.

53 **SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR**
The perfect excuse to throw a toga party.

54 **SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS**
Ico's spiritual sequel is finally coming to America.

57 **JAPANTOWN**
Sony makes PlayStations—it doesn't need to make games.

TOO MUCH, TOO SOON?

There's no denying that the next generation of consoles will be powerful, but will consumers care? These screens show what games may look like in the near future. Clockwise from top left, next-gen screens from *NBA Live 2006*, *Condemned*, *Full Auto*, and *Tiger Woods*.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

WHAT SONY CAN LEARN FROM THE PRESENT TO BE SUCCESSFUL WITH THE PS3

When new console hardware is on the horizon, there is always a single question that seems to come up repeatedly: Which company will reign supreme? While it might seem logical to some that the PlayStation 3 will maintain Sony's position as No. 1 in the industry, no one can deny the strong effort from Microsoft to make the Xbox 360 the prime platform for developers and consumers. But Microsoft's strategy of getting to the market before Sony and Nintendo may not be as important as the company makes it out to be. "Just because someone launches a new system, it doesn't mean everyone stops buying games for the current generation," says Michael Pachter, a leading industry analyst at Wedbush Morgan. "That happened with the PS2 launch, [but] it won't happen with the Xbox 360."

If history is any indication, being the first to market often results in a number of challenges—as shown with Sega's Dreamcast. But Pachter thinks that the Xbox 360 isn't necessarily in danger of facing those same problems. "The Dreamcast was different because Sega was a publisher and they alienated Electronic Arts," he says. "EA decided to throw everything behind Sony and then later Microsoft. Sega was saying, support our console, but also saying it wanted to compete with [EA], so that was a big advantage for Sony."

Still, there are problems for Microsoft to face—problems that will ultimately make it a little easier for Sony to maintain a foothold with the PS2 while the PS3 is being launched. "Microsoft had a technological advantage last time, and the advantage came from spending more money on the hardware. Did they exploit it? Not really; you constantly heard about Xbox games looking better, but really, few games were noticeably different. *Madden* on the Xbox didn't look that much different from *Madden* on the PS2 because EA wanted to make sure that it looked good on both systems," says Pachter. "There will be no technological advantage for Microsoft this time around. The only way Microsoft can get an advantage is if it comes up with a lot of exclusive content. The cost of making a game is going to limit the number of games that are exclusive because for an Xbox game, it's $3 million or $4 million to make, but for an Xbox 360 game, it's more like $15 million. Why spend $15 million to chase an installed base of 3 million or 4 million when you can make four PS2 games for the same cost and chase an installed base of 60 million or 70 million?"

With that in mind, the biggest issue facing Sony is complacency. Sitting at the top, the company could easily just assume that the Sony and PlayStation brands are enough to fuel the hype fires for a new console. But some would argue that it was luck that the PS2 even managed to get where it is as a mainstream console and that Sony may need similar luck again. "Sony has reverted back to making more niche games," says Pachter. "*SOCOM* and *Gran Turismo* are the only games that still compete in the minds of a lot of people, but Sony is doing game development as an afterthought. Sony isn't really concerned with making any frontline games. They really seem to have backed off tremendously."

Of course, it all depends on how other companies handle key properties as well. "Nintendo thought its content would drive console sales this generation, but the content they produce is geared toward a different type of personality—a younger and more hardcore audience," Pachter adds. "They just didn't develop enough first-party exclusive content. They haven't done anything beyond doing updates of older games. Microsoft has *Halo*. Sony didn't [make the PS2's signature game] themselves. They had Take-Two do it for them [with *Grand Theft Auto*]. Is that luck or design? It doesn't really matter, because it worked. If you wanted to play *Grand Theft Auto*, then you had to play it on a PS2."

> "SONY HAS REVERTED BACK TO MAKING MORE NICHE GAMES."

If anything has determined the success of one console over another this generation, it's support from Japanese developers. Sony still maintains supremacy in the Japanese market, which may prove to be another useful weapon in Sony's arsenal for the PS3. "Sony's huge advantage is the Japanese lineup," says Pachter. "If Microsoft can demonstrate they can penetrate the Japanese market, you're going to have the Capcom, Namco, and Konami guys lined up for the Xbox 360, and a lot of that translates pretty well here."

No one can really predict what's going to happen with the next generation of consoles, but with everything that's happened with the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube, there is at least an indication of what needs to happen for one console to be more successful than the others. «

JUNE 2K5

THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION

SUN MON TUES WED THUR FRI SAT

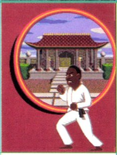
01

Supposedly, ***S.L.A.I.*** and ***Psychonauts*** hit stores today. One features meat circuses and emotional baggage, the other features apes in microchips. Zany!

[NEW GAMES]

02

Hey everybody, it's **Wayne Brady**'s birthday! You better give him something better than a gift card to Crate & Barrel, or he might snap your neck like he did to that poor cop in *Chappelle's Show*!



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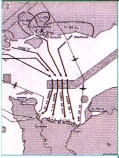


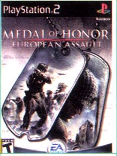
06

Today is the **anniversary of D-Day**. It was a key turning point in the war and a clear-cut example of good versus evil. Play *Medal of Honor: Frontline* as a reminder.

07

For more World War II remembering, pick up ***Medal of Honor: European Assault***. ***Arc the Lad: End of Darkness*** and ***Samurai Western*** also come out today.

[NEW GAMES]

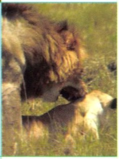


09

Natalie Portman, **Johnny Depp**, and **Michael J. Fox** are all having birthday bashes today! Don't call Mike "Marty," don't call Johnny a crybaby, and don't ask Natalie if the delivery was difficult.

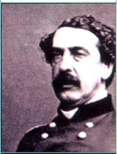
10

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie play married assassins out to kill each other in ***Mr. and Mrs. Smith***, which opens today. Will they have sexual congress like lions in the film? Watch and find out!



12

Say "thanks!" to **Abner Doubleday** for inventing the game of baseball on this day in 1839. But those of you who had to watch *Fever Pitch* a while back can curse Mr. Doubleday.



14

If you can't wait to manipulate a digital Christian Bale, then go snag the ***Batman Begins*** game today. Or you can pick up ***Juiced*** and pretend that your RX-8 is the Batmobile.

[NEW GAMES]

15

Batman Begins opens today, and batnerds like Scooter are going batcrazy! Batman is so cool that we bet **Ice Cube** is going to spend his birthday money on a ticket to see it!

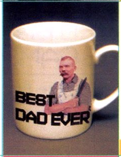
17

For every cool person who went to see ***Batman Begins*** two days ago, the mirror universe has an equally uncool person seeing ***The Perfect Man*** starring Hilary Duff instead.

18

19

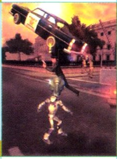
Hey, don't let your dad feel left out, as today is **Father's Day**. Don't get him flowers or fruits or a mug that says "Best Dad Ever" or whatnot, just go get him some sort of man-knife. He'll love you forever.



21

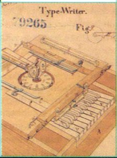
If you can't afford to go into space, maybe you can buy ***Destroy All Humans!*** and pretend you're a phantom spaceman. ***Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*** also comes out today.

[NEW GAMES]



23

Today is **Typewriter Day**, the day that celebrates the progenitor of our modern computational processors of words! We bow to you, oh typewriter, and your horrendously laid-out keyboard! Huzzah!



25

26

The **Chinese invented the bristle toothbrush** way back on this day in 1498. It was made from pig hair glued to pig bone. Five out of five dentists agree that such a toothbrush is crap.

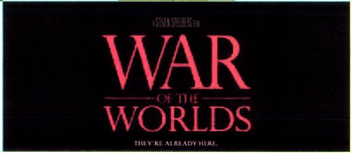
28

If you relish the chance to tell Jessica Alba where to go and how to jump, then the closest you can get without getting a restraining order is to buy ***Fantastic Four***, due out today.

[NEW GAMES]

29

Spielberg's remake of ***War of the Worlds*** comes out today. We wonder if these Martians will be defeated by a bunch of foppish dandies who were sick with the common cold. That'd be silly.



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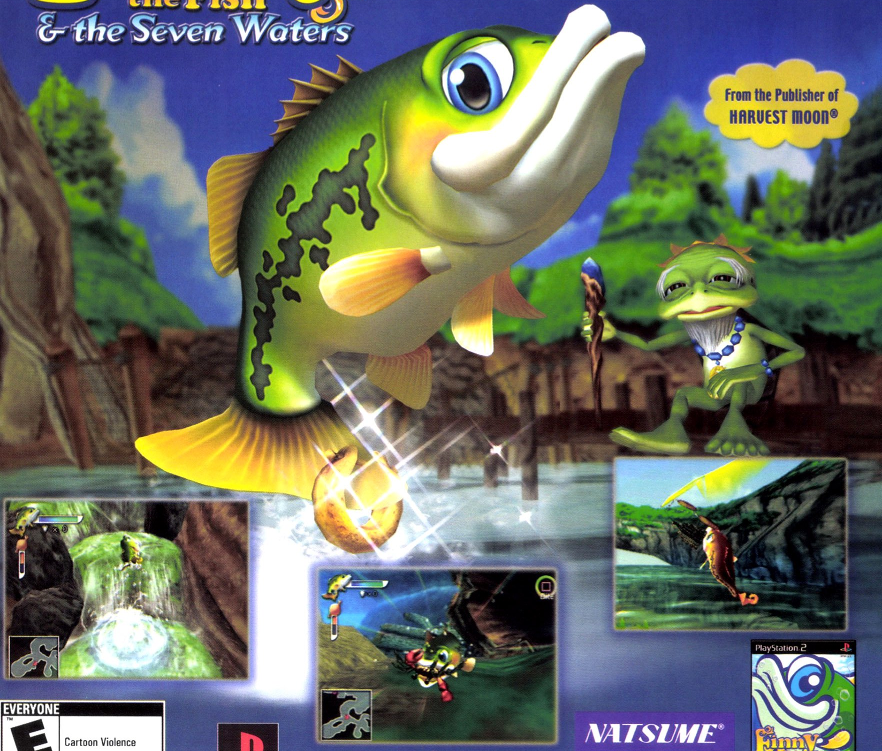

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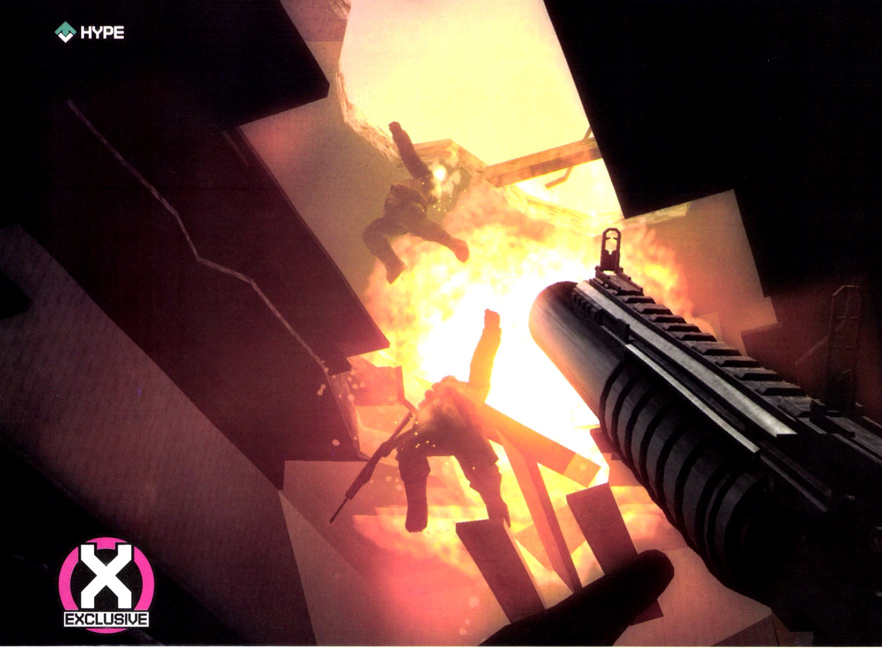


BLACK

THE BOYS WHO MADE BURNOUT ARE COMING IN SHOOTING

Once upon a time (which happened to be a little over a year ago), a group of friends took a trip from Great Britain to Nevada. While in Nevada, these friends met a man who took them on a journey to the desert. And in this desert, the man happened to have a stockpile of assault weapons, which the friends were allowed to go absolutely nuts with.

And those friends just happened to be the guys who created *Burnout*.

"They fired machine guns and pistols and all sorts of craziness," says Jeremy Chubb, the executive producer for *Black*. "And then they came back and said, 'This was awesome—there's nothing like it!' It's like driving a fast sports car: It's really exhilarating and a bit scary and very dangerous."

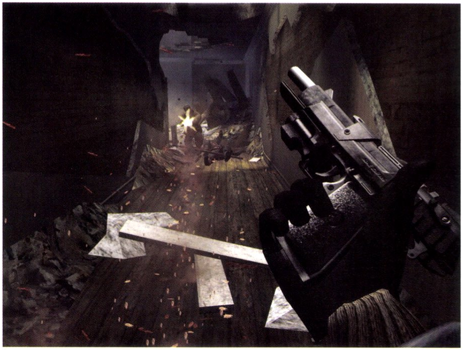
The experience out in the desert started the team thinking. "We're looking at *Ratchet & Clank* and *Max Payne* and *GTA*," says Chubb, "and all of them have guns in them, and all of them have shooting, but none of them really does shooting on a massive scale. None of them takes the experience of shooting a machine gun and delivers it in a fresh way. So that's what we wanted to do."

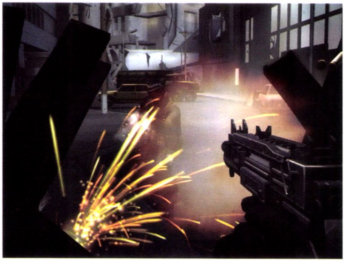
To keep them on track with what they wanted to accomplish, the team came up with five rules. Chubb says, "If we could deliver on these five things, we'd end up with shooting like no one has ever seen before. And that's our goal: We want to redefine shooting in videogames."

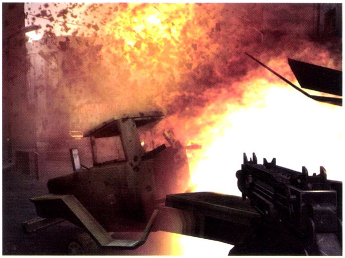
1. THE GUN IS THE STAR

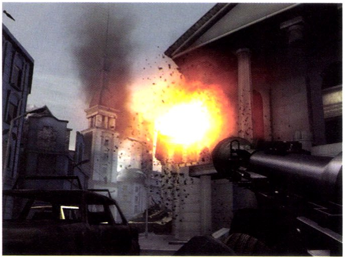
This, of all the rules, is possibly the most important. Most shooters, even in first person, make the focus a specific character, but in this game, the focus will be on the gun. "You'll see the gun as being really cool and sexy—we want to glamorize this experience as much as possible," says Chubb. They've even come up with a new term for it: gun porn.

There will be several guns jockeying their way to top billing. All the









THE CHALLENGE
Completely destructible environments are awesome in theory, but it's a big challenge to deliver on the concept. In the *very* early build we played, a few pillars stubbornly stayed upright despite a dozen blasts from the rocket launcher. We're keeping our fingers crossed that the game eventually achieves utter destruction.

standard players will be participating—AK-47, shotgun, rocket launcher, grenade launcher. And while it's still too early for specifics, the final lineup of weapons should be somewhere in the range of 50 guns overall.

2. EVERY BULLET IS OUR BABY

"It's not so much the hits that count, it's the misses," says Chubb. No one hits with 100 percent accuracy, but in *Black*, a miss doesn't mean nothing will go on. Your bullet could ricochet off the wall, triggering a shower of plaster, or your missed bullets might cause a ceiling to crumble on top of your enemies. "If you miss," Chubb promises, "it doesn't really matter because it still looks cool and it's still fun."

Those bullets will have a big playground in which to run around. "You've all played games where you shoot barrels and they explode," Chubb says. "We kind of like that, so we want to take that concept and apply it to our entire game." They're shooting for hugely destructible environments, so everything you aim at should get damaged spectacularly. Chubb smiles, "If it's not cool to shoot, we're probably not going to put it in the game." And don't worry about running out of bullets—you'll be blessed with a nearly infinite supply of ammo.

3. DEATH IS AN OPPORTUNITY

"In most videogames, the enemies don't really earn their money," points out Chubb. "You shoot them, they fall down, that's it."

The enemies in *Black* will have to work a lot harder for their keep: Expect much more theatrical death throes. For example, if you nail an opponent, it's unlikely that he will simply crumple into a heap. Much more probable is that he will spin around before falling off a ledge and smashing down on a car that is conveniently parked underneath him.

4. BIGGER AND LOUDER, LOUDER AND BIGGER

"Don't put a small gun in if you can put a big gun in," Chubb says. "Don't blow up something small when you can blow up something big. It's kind of common sense, but we're really trying to apply this to our whole game."

The team looked to Hollywood for help with this one. Sure, what happens in some movie blockbusters may be improbable (or impossible—that bus leap in *Speed* broke the laws of physics), but it's their over-the-top unrealistic nature that makes these films so fun. It's doubtful that you could re-create much of what happens in *Black* in real life, but who plays games to get in touch with reality?

> "IF IT'S NOT COOL TO SHOOT, WE'RE NOT GOING TO PUT IT IN THE GAME."

5. LEAVE A TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION

"When you've finished going through a level, it's going to be like a tornado hit," says Chubb. "By the end, it should be ultimately decimated." He's not exaggerating—before we drew our guns on the level that we got to play (for more, turn the page to get our hands-on impressions), it was a fairly typical, albeit slightly rundown, city street. But by the time we were done, no window was unbroken, no car was unsmashed, no crate was intact. Pillars from buildings had been splintered into tiny pieces, signs on buildings were in shards on the ground, and enemies were scattered everywhere. Sweet.

BULLET TIME

It may not be tasteful to admit it, but sometimes there's just something therapeutic and happy about the sounds of destruction. And that's a phenomenon the development team at Criterion is well aware of.

"With the original demo, there was just the premise of if we could make shooting in an empty room fun, just pulling the trigger on a pistol and seeing bits of the wall come off, if we could make that feel fresh, then [we'd make the game]," shares Chubb. "And if we couldn't, then we were f***ed, and we wouldn't make the game."

The first time we saw *Black*, at E3 2004, we played that very demo. It did indeed begin in an empty room, and we spent several minutes shooting just to watch the destruction bullets caused. As we sprayed ammo from an AK-47, every ricochet left scars on the wall. And it was fun.

So the game moved forward. "[There are] a lot of games that heavily involve sneaking around," says Chubb. "[Those games have] a big focus on squad control and moving lots of characters around, and it's very realistic. But we want to really put the fun back in this genre—where we really want to do just shooting and blowing stuff up."

Shooting and blowing stuff up indeed. The game is set in contemporary Eastern Europe, and you're part of a team of four that's been sent in to confront a terrorist group. (Your compadres are two guys and a girl, though more details about them won't be revealed till later.) The level we played started in the hallway of a building; the goal was to blast through the enemies to meet up with our partners, who were down on the street.

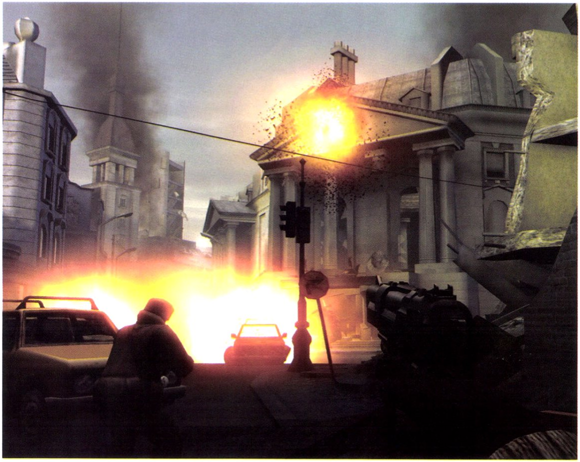
The action was fast and furious. While in the building, we took out bad guys either by shooting them directly or through other fun methods—for example, it was possible to take out ceilings so that the enemies perched above you collapsed to the floor in a pile of rubble. Once we were on the street, it was time for the rocket launcher, which takes cars out in a very satisfying whoosh of flames.

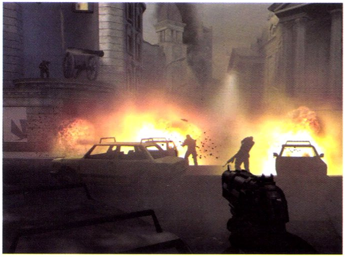
There were a number of pathways to the enemy, but we think that's less to give you multiple choices than it is to increase the area upon which you can wreak absolute havoc. After reaching our teammates, we backtracked so we could be sure that we'd blown up everything that could be blown up.

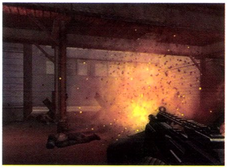
Controls are very straightforward, which was very intentional. "When we were making *Burnout*, there was this sense that if your mom and sister can't enjoy it, then we're doing something wrong," says Chubb. "It's a first-person shooter for everybody." But only one everybody at a time: There are no plans for any type of multiplayer.

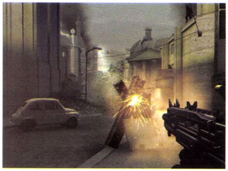
So blowing everything up on a level is a lot of fun, but will the experience stay fresh throughout an entire game? It's a challenge the team is well aware of. Chubb confesses, "The risk of designing something that's aggressively focused on just one thing is that it can be too simple, and we wanted to make the experience as deep as possible." Just how they'll do that remains to be seen, but we're eagerly awaiting the answer. «

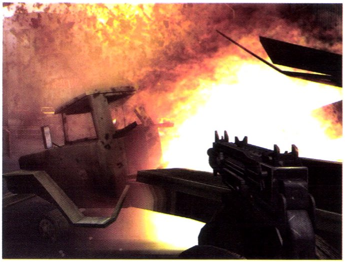
Pub. EA Games **Dev.** Criterion **Release** February 2006

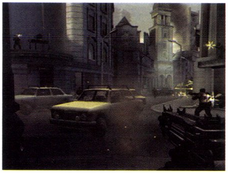


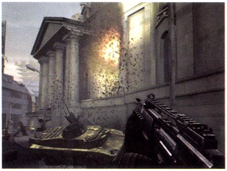












APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

Much like the *Burnout 4* team, the group working on *Black* has a reel of movie clips that they look to for inspiration. There are the requisite appearances from the gun-toting stars of the action-blockbuster era: Stallone struts across the screen in Rambo garb, blasting enemies with his AK-47, and Arnold holds terrorists at bay in *True Lies*. Also like the *Burnout 4* team, one of the *Black* team's most prominent films on its clip reel is *Bad Boys II*. If Columbia Pictures was smart, it would ask Criterion for some sort of royalty fee on the developer's games.

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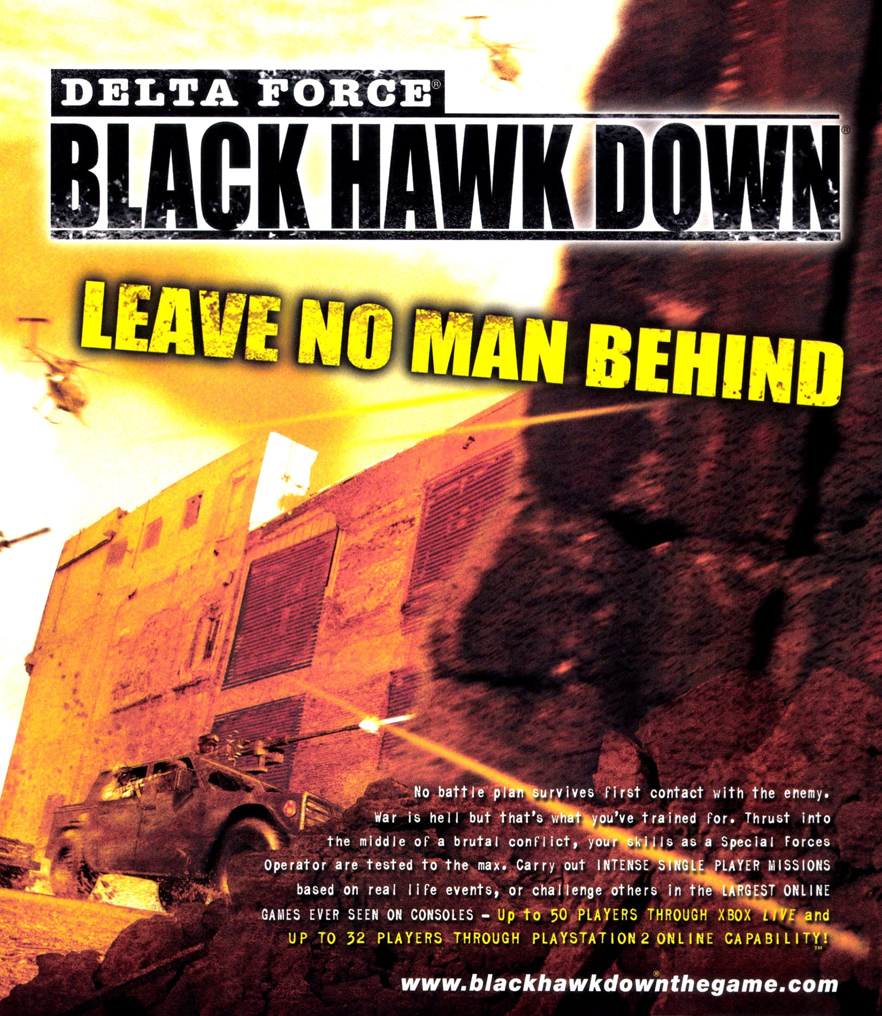

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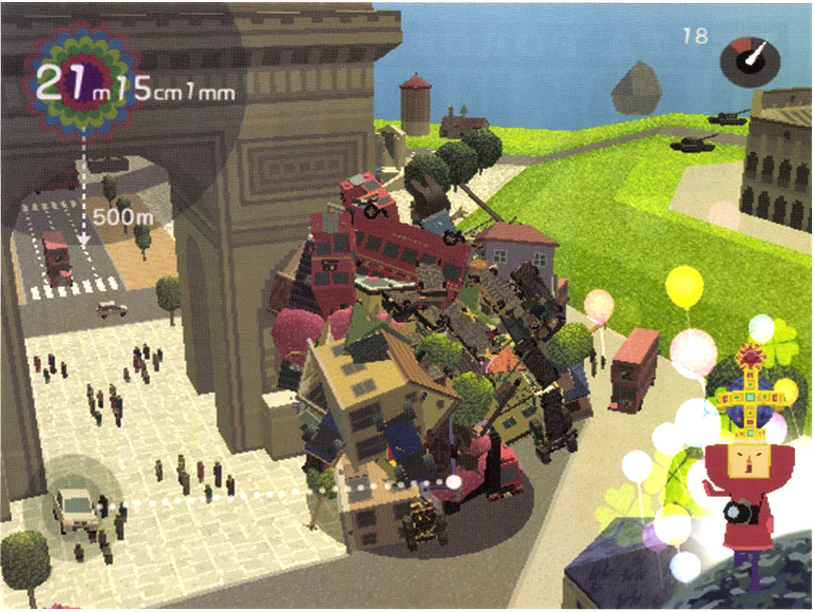
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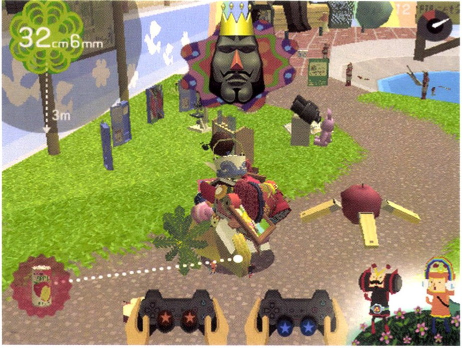

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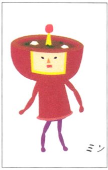

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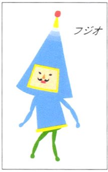

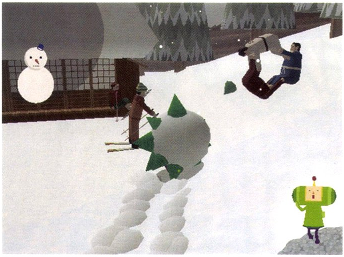

ALL IN THE FAMILY

If you don't feel like playing as the Prince, you'll have a number of other options. They will each have their own names, to be revealed later on, but we think that we will be sticking with our own monikers for them, such as Miso-Head and ConeHead.

Last year at this time, *Katamari Damacy* was an oddball little game that Namco put on display in its E3 booth to appease the Japanophiles traipsing through. Little did the company know that a year later, one of the show's most anticipated titles would be the game's sequel, *We Love Katamari*.

The King of All Cosmos has become incredibly popular thanks to the Prince's katamari-rolling skills. Popularity agrees with the King, so he's eager to keep his fans happy, which leads him to enlist the Prince and all his cousins to satisfy the fans' requests. Fortunately for gameplay, all requests just happen to fall within the parameters of sphere generating.

The basic game structure, which endeared itself to its fans, is unchanged, but there are additional touches that make the sequel worth a look. Select the Prince or one of his cousins to roll katamaris, and then choose a fan to hear his or her request. In addition to the basic land environments of the last game, this time your katamaris will need to make their way through snow and under the ocean. The different environments will impact how the katamari moves; for example, on the icy pond in the snowy level, it's hard to get your katamari to stop, and impacts from speed skaters winging their way across the pond will send your katamari careening across the surface.

While the last version's goals were all of the same type (make a katamari this big in that amount of time), you'll see a little more variety this time out. One of the levels we saw merely specified that you make a head to put on top of a snowman—no time or size constraints. Another fan request was that all the people in a school be rolled up into one giant ball—it didn't matter how big the ball was, just as long as you got every person into the spherical mass within the allotted time. Another woman would love for you to make a romantic katamari filled with as many flowers as possible. If you successfully meet the fan's demands, then the king may knock one of your old katamaris down from the sky and replace it with the new one. But if you fail, the King of All Cosmos now augments his insults with lasers that shoot out of his eyes. You can actually use the controller to help the Prince dodge out of the way, too—it doesn't change the end result, but it helps accomplish the goal of adding interactivity to more parts of the game.

The other change is the expansion of multiplayer. In addition to the competition mode (which has been expanded from the last version), there is also a co-op mode. Two players using two controllers can work together to control the Prince as he rolls up his katamari—essentially, the left controller behaves as the left analog stick, and the right controller behaves as the right analog stick. It's a bit tricky at first, since it requires quite a bit of verbal communication ("No, push up, push UP!"), but after a few minutes, it's pretty entertaining to work together as a team to roll up the world. Co-op mode should be an option on all levels, so you'll be able to play the game all the way through with a friend.

DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS IMPACT HOW THE KATAMARI MOVES.

Happily, the King is just as acerbic and condescending and emotionally abusive as he was in the last game, and the soundtrack is just as eccentric and lovable. We're practicing our rolling skills.

Pub. Namco Dev. Namco Release Q4 2005

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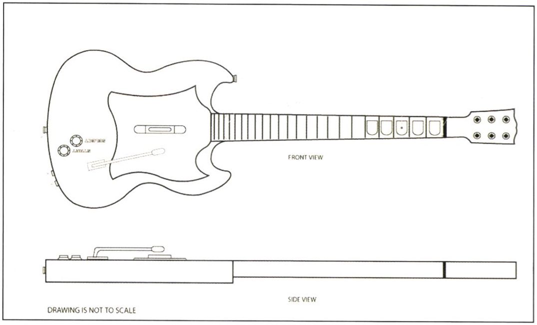
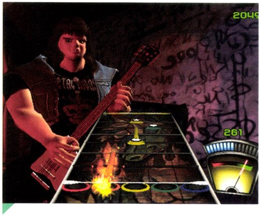
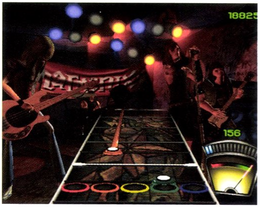
Illustration by Nathan Fox







RedOctane knows hardcore. If you're really into dance games, you're undoubtedly familiar with the company's line of high-end dance pads. Or perhaps you're really into light-gun games, and you use its unbelievably niche reload pedal designed to mimic the *Time Crisis* arcade unit. Or maybe you're really into fighting games, and you've seen its high-end fighting stick that is, in essence, taken straight from an arcade cabinet.

"We pick all these odd things," says RedOctane's vice president of business development, Charles Huang, "because we have always focused on the hardcore." The company started out in 1999, renting videogames over the Internet—before Netflix launched a similar service for DVDs, incidentally. But they had no idea where they'd end up.

"*Dance Dance Revolution* happened to be one of the imports that was very popular," says president and CEO Kai Huang. "So people were renting the games from us and asking us, 'Hey, do you sell dance pads?' For a couple months, we just told people we didn't do it, and finally we decided, why don't we try?" At first, the company rebranded existing pads, but soon the brothers Huang decided to design their own, with extensive input from their hardcore fan base. The pads grew in popularity, so they tried other niche peripherals, from an Atari-style USB joystick to a taiko drum. Then, in 2004, the company decided to make the leap into software publishing. The first result is the staggeringly hardcore *In the Groove* (reviewed this month on page 75). Now we get to show you the next step.

Taking a cue from Konami's Japan-only *Guitar Freaks*, RedOctane will release *Guitar Hero*, a deeper, more challenging rhythm-music game with an all-new Gibson SG–shaped controller. If you're not familiar with *Guitar Freaks*, the concept is simple: You keep the rhythm with a lever on the body of the guitar that mimics pick movement and hit the right notes by pressing the three buttons on the neck. *Guitar Hero* makes this formula infinitely more varied by adding two more buttons to the neck of RedOctane's custom controller and a whammy bar on the body. With five buttons on the guitar, the game can throw power chords, hammer-ons, and extremely complicated riffs at you—the kind of stuff *Guitar Freaks* never dreamed of. In our exclusive hands-on session we thoroughly embarrassed ourselves despite having more than a passing familiarity with guitar theory; this game may not teach you to play guitar, but it should be great finger-work for any player.

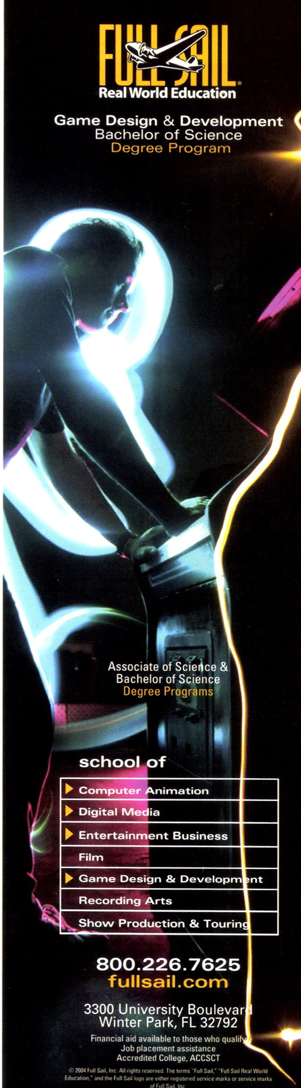
With a musical lineup drawn from a pool of classics and development by music specialists Harmonix (*Frequency*, *Karaoke Revolution*), *Guitar Hero* ought to inspire a new generation to raise the goblet of rock. Oh, and memo to Konami: You snooze, you lose. \m/ «

Pub. RedOctane Dev. Harmonix Release Holiday 2005

ROCK ON

Here's an early list of confirmed songs for *Guitar Hero*. Expect at least 20 more by release.

Boston: "More Than a Feeling"
Helmet: "Unsung"
Jimi Hendrix: "Spanish Castle Magic"
Red Hot Chili Peppers: "Higher Ground"
Sum 41: "Fat Lip"
White Zombie: "Thunder Kiss 65"
ZZ Top: "Sharp Dressed Man"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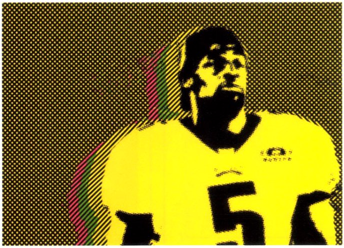

NABBING THE COVER

Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb will be featured on the cover of *Madden NFL 2006*. This emphasis on a quarterback falls in line with *Madden 2006*'s new gameplay feature called vision and precision, which forces quarterbacks to make smarter passes based on their field of view. If a ball is thrown to a receiver outside a QB's field of vision, then the chances of the pass missing its mark increase. At any rate, Eagles fans better hope the *Madden* curse doesn't strike McNabb this year.

EA HITS THE SLOPES

Electronic Arts has announced the next game in its popular snowboarding series. Currently titled *SSX On Tour*, the new game will actually include skiers for the first time, in addition, of course, to the usual allotment of eccentric extreme snowboarders. You will also be able to create your own character and take him or her through a series of challenges, competing against the best skiers and boarders from around the world. Get ready to shred the slopes this fall.

ZOE FLOWER

AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER

ZOE FLOWER tells people she is a freelance columnist and television producer. This is a nicer way of saying she has a tendency to babble incoherently in print and on video. Or in front of the mirror in the morning. Or while driving. Which explains how she ended up sinking her car in the ocean.

I hate buying shoes for a specific activity. I can guarantee that on a normal day I would never purchase a pair of orthopedic sandals that lack bright colors or sassy heels. But I have a feeling I'm going to need my feet to be ready to hike longer distances than ever at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (which, as I write this, is less than two weeks away). And why is this year's E3 much different than any other? To the untrained eye, it will appear to be the same colorful melting pot of booths, babes, and behind-closed-doors previews with lines around the block. But for me, it's going to be a lot more.

You may think this is because of all the next-generation announcements lined up back to back, showing off stuff for me to fantasize about over the coming year. Or perhaps you are considering that the *Metal Gear Solid 4* trailer might surface, which I would then have to watch 15 times from every angle. Yes, it will take considerable energy to brave the crowds of fans and then display my fervent cheering and swooning. I'm so fickle—the glamorous promises of a next-gen affair have been known to make me forget my previous long-term relationship commitments to an older system losing its luster in my living room.

But this is where I hit a time paradox! In fact, with all the fanfare for the PS3, I'm equally excited for hands-on time with a pile of new PS2 games due out in the next year. Thus I am torn! Finding time to traipse between eye-popping press conferences, secret previews, star-studded developer roundtables, and the growing list of booths showing off exciting new content—well, now you see my concern. Maybe I should get a pocket bike for the show floor? Mowing down mascots and making my appointments on time…this could be a solid plan—and loads of fun to boot!

And if you think I'm just being my melodramatic self (I am), take a look at some of the things on the list! I've got to get to Sony's booth to check out *Shadow of the Colossus* and harass the nice PR people for any news on a *God of War* sequel, plus say hello to old friends like Sly and Ratchet. Then it's off to Capcom for some puppy love with *Okami* before blowing by EA to play *Burnout Revenge* and *Black*. Then I'll bounce by Eidos to congratulate Toby Gard on returning to *Tomb Raider*. All this before making an obligatory fangirl scene at Konami! Phew! I haven't even factored in the inevitable time and distance lost to my horrific sense of direction, plus the fact that my unfiltered excitement will have me stopping every five feet to freak out over a new trailer. Somewhere in there I've got to play games that I don't even know about yet (things like *Indigo Prophecy*, which I just found out about this week!).

OK, I'll stop rubbing in all the hardworking fun I'll be having. The point I'm so randomly attempting to make is that the PS2 has its best days ahead of it—for all of us. The PS3 might sway my affections momentarily, but I guarantee that this current love affair is far from over. «

THIS CURRENT LOVE AFFAIR IS FAR FROM OVER.

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Jason Martin
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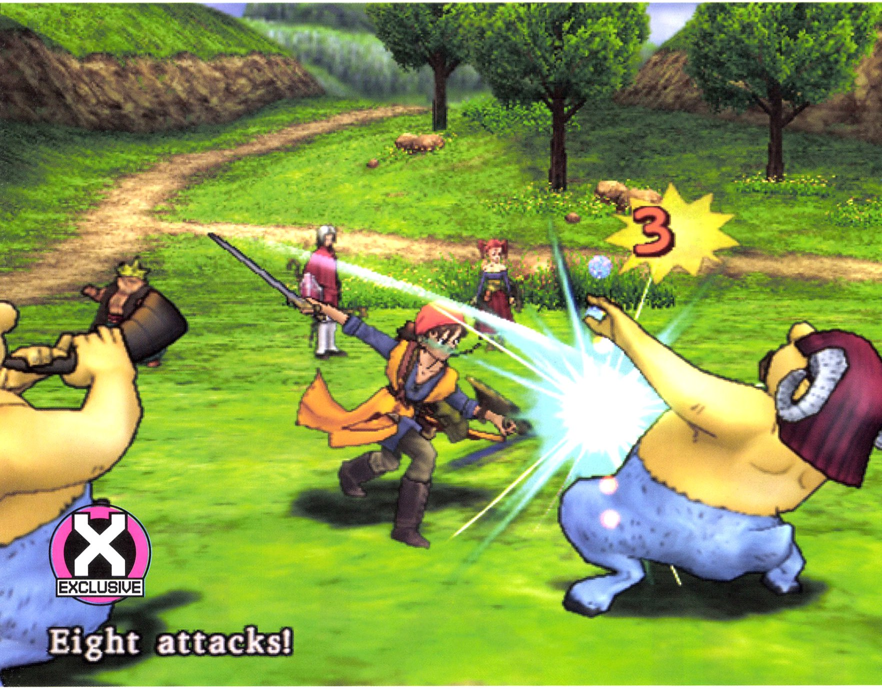
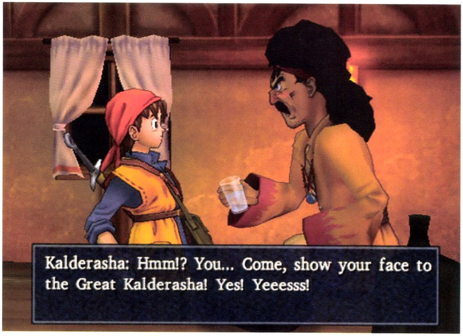
LET'S ROLE... PLAY

Like pretending to be someone else? Here's our pick of 12 upcoming RPGs for you to take roles in.

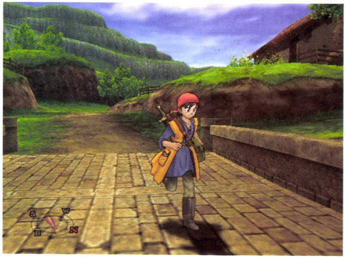

3
EXCLUSIVE
Eight attacks!

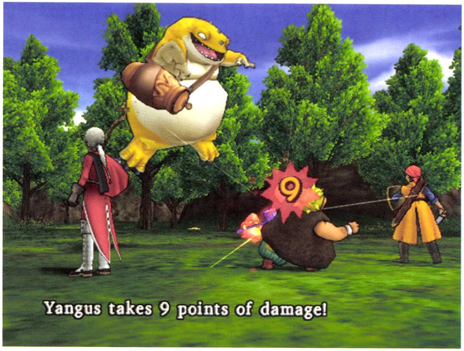
DRAGON QUEST VIII

THE BIGGEST SECRET IN SQUARE'S ARSENAL

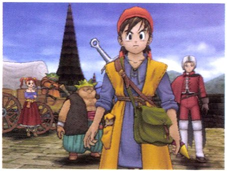


Kalderasha: Hmm!? You... Come, show your face to the Great Kalderasha! Yes! Yeeesss!





Yangus takes 9 points of damage!



AMERICA, YEAH!

The major addition for the U.S. release of *DQ8* will be voiceovers. It's actually a tradition for the Japanese versions to have just text and no voice, but here in the States there will be spoken dialogue for major cut-scenes. Other additions for the U.S. version include more spells and special attacks for characters. Basically, we Americans will get to pull off mightier attacks than Japanese gamers can. Finally, in more of a change than an addition, the menu system will be more graphical than the Japanese version's text-based menus.

Dragon Quest VIII is quite easily the most pastoral game out there. It's one of the few titles that soothes rather than excites. That's not to say it's dry or boring—being a snorefest doesn't make your game series so desirable that the government mandates that new versions be released on weekends so as to not interfere with school or work, as is the case with the *DQ* games in Japan. No, *DQ8* just happens to punctuate its epic fantasy-RPG high jinks with rolling hills, adorable creatures, and captivating vistas.

By no coincidence, the Japanese subtitle for *DQ8* is "The Sky, the Ocean, the Continent, and the Cursed Princess," which illustrates its focus on both the story within the world and the world itself. The story is about you, the hero (whom you name), journeying through the world with your buddy Yangus, King Trode (who's been cursed and made to look like a monster), and Princess Medea (who's been turned into a horse). Along the way, you'll traverse a whole lot of land, fight various beasts, explore numerous dungeons, and do all sorts of subquests in quaint little towns scattered across the landscape.

While there is, indeed, a high-adventure story full of magic and intrigue, the story isn't the star—rather, the world itself and your adventure in it are. *DQ* producer and creator Yuji Horii comments, "I really wanted to focus on keeping the hero of the story as simply an extension of the player. The character will not involuntarily speak or move. The hero will only move at your own will at all times."

He continues, "Basically, *DQ* is not a drama that you watch but a game that you yourself experience. In that sense, what's displayed on the screen could be a bit restrained to the eye, but I have faith that there is an epic story evolving in the minds of those who are playing the game." So while you won't get the crazy cinema overload of other RPGs, what you get is the feeling that you're actually inside a fantasy world in the starring role.

Traditionally, while *Dragon Quest* (previously known in the United States as *Dragon Warrior*) games have had big worlds filled with buckets of gameplay, the aesthetics weren't quite up to par. Reviews of past titles frequently remarked on the good gameplay coupled with the low-end graphics. For this outing, however, Horii and his team chose Level-5 (the developers behind *Dark Cloud 2*) to create the game. When asked why he selected them, Horii answers, "Their high technological skills and taste in style. They built the entire 3D world with polygons with such expertise that it maintains a charm and warmth that almost doesn't feel like 3D."

THE STORY ISN'T THE STAR—RATHER, THE WORLD ITSELF IS.

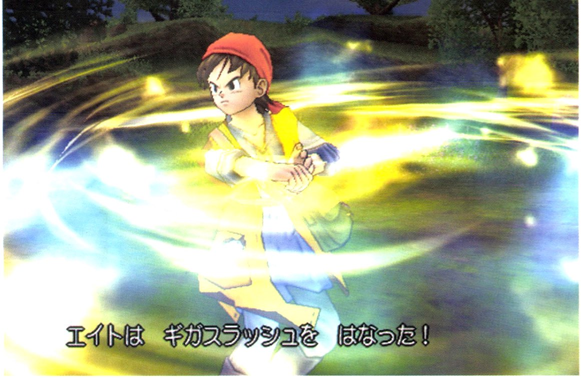
HORII ON DQ'S SUCCESS

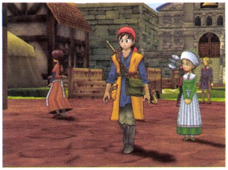
HOW'D THESE SLIMES GET SO BIG?

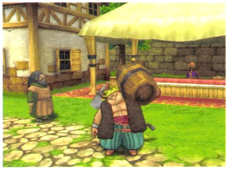
"It's been almost 20 years since the first *Dragon Quest* was released in Japan. This was a time when the RPG genre was only for a small group of fanatics. I thoroughly focused on how easy it would be to pick up the game when creating it for the home console.

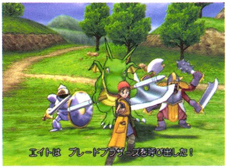
"It all began with my intention to create a niche game such as an RPG that could be played without an instruction manual. No matter how fun the product might be, it would be terrible if the player stumbles at the very threshold of the game. I next focused on creating a welcoming doorway to a world that would greet the player with open arms. Even if this place were to be ruled by evil, I wanted to build a real humane world where the player would want to stay forever. The hero of this world is the player himself. I set out to build a story where the hero—the player—can freely explore and be genuinely excited. And so, the completed product was *Dragon Quest*.

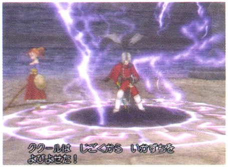
"This was a time when the maximum game size was at 64KB, but as the hardware evolved, *DQ* also made progressive leaps. But the original concept of allowing anyone to play without any troubles and building a welcoming world where anyone can journey freely around the world as the hero has never changed. I believe that this idea is why a million, 2 million, 3 million, and even 4 million people have enjoyed *DQ* over the years."











HORII FUNNIES

Yuji Horii didn't set out to be a game developer. He recalls: "I originally dreamed of writing stories for comic books. After graduating college I became a freelance writer, but I still couldn't let go of my dreams. So, while doing my freelance writing jobs, I was writing scripts for comic books. This is when I was introduced to a computer. I learned how to program and was captivated by the potentials of interactivity. I guess what made me want to create the *Dragon Quest* series was the thought of using an interactive media to create a story instead of only pen and paper."

Level-5's knowledge of PS2 development and "toon shading" results in a lush, animated world. In fact, the creatures actually look like the original drawings of Akira Toriyama (character and monster designer for *DQ* and also the creator of a little franchise called *Dragon Ball Z*). No concessions or adaptations were made in translating Toriyama's drawings into in-game characters (right down to putting the correct amount of teeth in a troll's mouth). As an aside, this is the first 3D title in the series, which meant the team had to solve new puzzles such as "What does this creature's back look like?"

While the graphics make *Dragon Quest* resemble a cartoon, the gameplay is a solid refinement of previous games'. You still walk around a massive (at least several hundred kilometers in size) world—without any load times—fighting and questing with your party of four (yourself, Yangus, and the soon-added adventurers Jessica and Angelo; Trode and Medea don't actually fight). Combat is turn-based, but unlike in past *DQ* games, you can now attack specific enemies rather than groups. (For example, you can target one specific slime instead of all three slimes.)

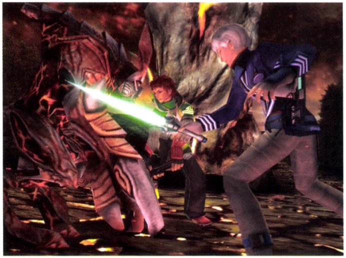
You also have a traditional array of spells and special moves, and you can alchemize weapons and items. Everyone has five specific skills; you assign points to them to unlock special moves. For example, while the hero has traditional skills such as strength and courage, Jessica has a playful skill called "sexiness" that will charm the monsters.

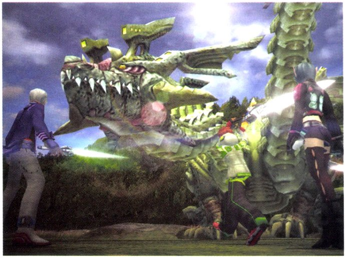
This solid gameplay is packed into a huge world; employees on the development team can get through it in about 40 hours, but it's not uncommon to see saved games with clocks as high as 170 hours. Some Japanese gamers don't even try to finish the game but instead choose to just walk around the world, see the sights, try to tame an animal or two, find all the townspeople, and just watch the sunset.

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON TO SEE SAVED GAMES OF 170 HOURS.

What is Horii the most proud of in *DQ8*? "I'm most pleased that the game was able to reflect the fascinating characters that [Toriyama] created almost completely, and that I was able to build a truthful world where one can reach any location that the eye can see," he says. "Honestly, there are so many things I'm proud of that I can't decide on just one thing. I will be most fulfilled if this wonderful game can be played by people all over the world."

Pub. Square Enix **Dev.** Level-5 **Release** TBD





PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

HEY, THERE'S SOME SINGLE PLAYER IN MY MULTIPLAYER!

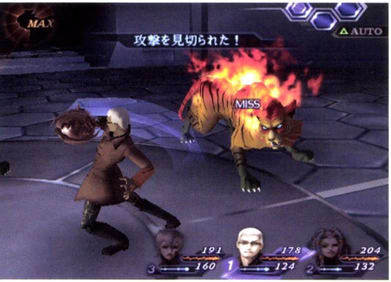
Usually, online and offline console games tend to stay separate. Sure, you get the occasional online multiplayer mode in an otherwise offline single-player game (see: *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal*), but that's about it. *Phantasy Star*, however, went from being an awesome turn-based single-player RPG franchise on the Genesis to becoming a persistent online *Diablo*-style action-RPG franchise on the Dreamcast and GameCube. Now, Sega is doing something crazy by melding the two genres together in *Phantasy Star Universe*.

Basically, you can play a big action-RPG about some kid named Ethan Waber who wants to save his sister from "The Seed." This is pretty typical, as it's a 40-hour adventure filled with cut-scenes, and twists and turns that wrench you emotionally, plus plenty of dungeons to explore and characters (who speak) to love and hate. If you've played the other *Phantasy Star Online* games, you'll notice that in the single-player game, your hunting party that used to consist of you and three other players has now become a party of you and three AI members. And while you control only Ethan, you can issue behavior settings to your other three buddies. When you finish that epic quest, you're not done, as there's a concurrent online version in which you take a different character (who is totally customizable) to hunt monsters online with. In fact, you can switch between playing online and offline whenever you want (it was rumored that *PSU* would require you to finish the single-player story before letting you go online, but that's not true). So while Ethan is doing his own thing in the single-player game, you'll be zipping around the Internet with some pals killing things—in fact, you'll even run into references about what Ethan's up to. Both the single-player and online modes will retain the *Online* series' fast-paced *Diablo*-style action-RPG mechanics, and the small fee you'll need to pay every month for the online mode translates into new monthly content courtesy of Sega. In fact, Sega is considering adding new quests and items as frequently as every week.

WHEN YOU FINISH THE EPIC QUEST, YOU'RE NOT DONE.

Will this bizarre and totally unorthodox marriage work? Even though there are two wacky and different modes, they are separate enough to make it feel as though you're getting two games in one. Whether you like to sit alone in the darkness or chat it up with your Internet friends, Sega is going to have you covered.

Pub. Sega **Dev.** Sega Studios **Release** Q1 2006



MAX
AUTO
CRITICAL

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DIGITAL DEVIL SAGA 2

WHERE WE'RE GOING, WE DON'T NEED ROADS

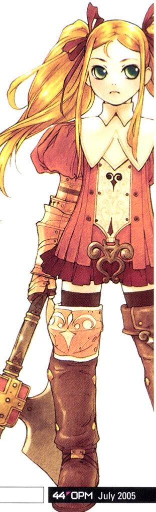
OK, so remember how when you finished the first *Digital Devil Saga* this spring, you got a whopping cliffhanger ending? Well, Atlus seems to have been inspired by *Back to the Future*—which saw a quick follow-up way back when—as it'll resolve the cliffhanger by releasing the second *DDS* this fall. However, new players to the series needn't fret: Even if you didn't finish the first game, *DDS2* has so much bizarro plot and explains enough of *DDS*' story that playing the first game isn't a prerequisite for enjoying this one (though you will get neat loot as a bonus for importing your save game).

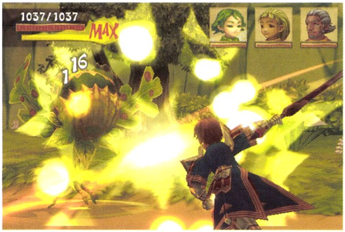
The main changes are a new half-human/half-demon mode (as opposed to being fully human or demon as you were in *DDS*) and a new "karma ring" system that lets you modify items and abilities. Also, since it's an *SMT* game, you can count on it having the weirdest story out there (we don't think there will be a wheelchair-bound Lucifer in here, but you never know).

Pub. Atlus USA **Dev.** Atlus **Release** Fall

THE STORY

DDS2 shows that Nirvana isn't a glorious paradise of enlightenment and awesomeness, it's just an even more post-apocalyptic wasteland with Gorgon-like sunlight that turns people into stone. The designers at Atlus sure are a bunch of downers!



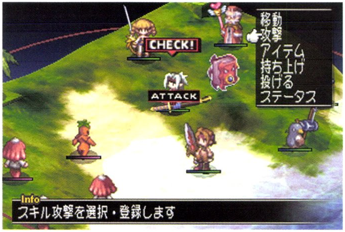


RADIATA STORIES

A BOY AND HIS FAIRY

The latest from the folks who brought you *Star Ocean 3* contains no weird, simulated worlds or dimensions beyond ours. Instead, this is strictly a fantasy story about a dude named Jack and a fairy named Ridley. The real-time combat system found in *Star Ocean 3* has been enhanced with "link attacks," which let two characters join together and smack down evil simultaneously. Jack can choose from more than 150 dudes and dudettes when it comes to selecting dancing, er, fighting partners.

Pub. Tri-Ace **Dev.** Square Enix **Release** Fall



MAKAI KINGDOM

MY KINGDOM FOR A PENGUIN!

This game casts you as a crazy demon dude who gets turned into a talking, flying book. This is the follow-up to *Phantom Brave*, so expect plenty of weird and wonderful turn-based strategy. You will be able to create units out of objects, turn units into buildings, summon buildings into battle, and arm penguins with rocket launchers. Yes, you read that right—penguins with rocket launchers. If you want the whole rundown of all the weird stuff you can do in this game, then check out the trailer that's on this month's DVD.

Pub. Nippon Ichi Software America **Dev.** Nippon Ichi Software **Release** Summer

TALES OF LEGENDIA

KIRU BIRU

This action-RPG is another entry in the series of *Tales* (including *Symphonia, Eternia,* and *Phantasia*). There's the traditional epic story and cute 3D characters and zany high jinks, but what's new is the "X-LiMBS" system, which stands for Crossover Linear Motion Battle System, which is fancy talk for "plays somewhat like a fighting game since the development team had dudes who worked on *Soul Calibur*." Also, Kazuto Nakazawa—who worked on the anime sequences in *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*—did the character design.

Pub. Namco Hometek **Dev.** Namco **Release** February 2006

7 HIT!
23
117/ 117
220/ 220

FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST: CURSE OF THE CRIMSON ELIXIR

FULL GOLD

This is what we should have gotten in place of the previous *Fullmetal Alchemist* game. You still play a budding alchemist named Ed and still issue orders to your brother Al, who is now a walking suit of armor. Except everything is now cel-shaded (like the cartoon), you have better attack combos, and there are even zanier things to alchemize (barrels that can be turned into mice bombs). Heck, there's a half-hour of exclusive video, so if you want to crown yourself king or queen of alchemy, you'll need to pick this up.

Pub. Square Enix **Dev.** Racjin Co. **Release** Summer

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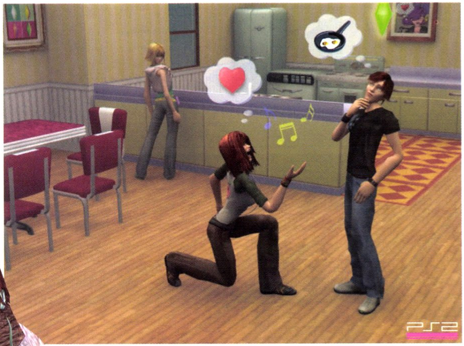
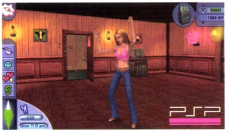


VIEWMASTER

If you've got an EyeToy, then dust it off and plug it back in: PS2 players will be able to use it to take pictures they can then import into their Sims' environments. For example, you could snap a shot of yourself sticking out your tongue and then import it as a piece of artwork, so your Sims will actually have a photo of you hanging on their wall. You can even plaster your face across T-shirts that your Sims can then wear.



THE SIMS 2

THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR RPG RETURNS

While people often think of Japanese developers as having a corner on the RPG market, the world's best-selling RPG series (in fact, the best-selling of any series) is actually developed right here on American soil. And even though *The Sims* might not be traditionally thought of as an RPG, it actually is a textbook perfect definition of the genre: Assume a personality other than yours and guide that personality through a series of choices in an adventure.

Last year's PC version of *The Sims 2* completely overhauled the series. Now the game is structured around a set of stories that drives the events in a town (one of these towns, Strangetown, is where all the action in the PSP version of the game takes place). Your Sims can play a role in how events develop and what happens as a result.

We must confess that we were disappointed to hear that the biggest change from the first game in the PC version of *The Sims 2*—the ability to watch your characters age and build your families into dynasties—isn't making it to consoles. That's primarily because the hardware capacities of this generation of consoles just aren't strong enough to handle the aging system. Instead, you'll create a character and choose his or her age, which will remain static throughout gameplay.

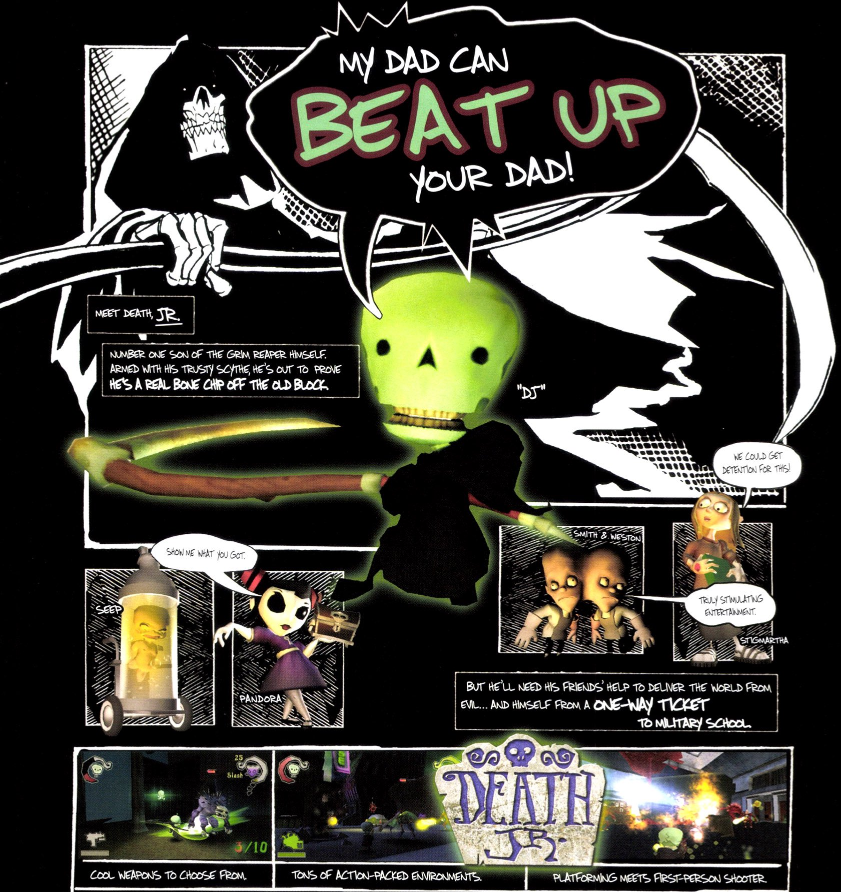
The customization levels have been upped immensely from prior iterations. In addition to all the traditional options, this time you'll even have the ability to stretch and compress your Sims' heads and bodies. You'll also be able to customize clothing, and the further you go in the game, the more options you'll unlock to make your clothing just the way you want it.

Characters in *The Sims 2* are motivated by more than just moment-to-moment needs, such as hunger and energy; they now have overarching social aspirations that drive their desires—for example, your Sim may want to make another Sim fall in love with her. One of the ways your Sim could help fulfill that desire is through item creation. If her cooking ability is high enough, she may be able to make a cake that will cause the other Sim to fall in love with her. But be careful—your Sims also now have memories, so if she were to get rejected, she would be much more reluctant to make another attempt to impress her crush.

The Sims 2 is also coming to PSP, so you'll be able to control your digital avatars on the go. This version actually marks a big milestone for the series, as your Sims will actually be able to own cars for the first time. Your car serves as your base of operations in the game, and you'll use it to travel around the game's five new neighborhoods. As expected, there will be plenty of minigames available, and at least some of these will have multiplayer options, although the number of players has yet to be announced. You'll also be able to use the Wi-Fi connection to trade items and even Sims with other players. And in a move that we hope becomes standard for PSP games, you'll be able to listen to your own MP3s while you play.

SIMS NOW HAVE OVERARCHING ASPIRATIONS.

Pub. EA Games **Dev.** EA Games **Release** Q4 2005


MY DAD CAN BEAT UP YOUR DAD!
MEET DEATH, JR.
NUMBER ONE SON OF THE GRIM REAPER HIMSELF. ARMED WITH HIS TRUSTY SCYTHE, HE'S OUT TO PROVE HE'S A REAL BONE CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK.
"DJ"
WE COULD GET DETENTION FOR THIS!
SHOW ME WHAT YOU GOT.
SEEP
PANDORA
SMITH & WESTON
TRULY STIMULATING ENTERTAINMENT.
STIGMARTHA
BUT HE'LL NEED HIS FRIENDS' HELP TO DELIVER THE WORLD FROM EVIL... AND HIMSELF FROM A ONE-WAY TICKET TO MILITARY SCHOOL.
DEATH JR.
COOL WEAPONS TO CHOOSE FROM.
TONS OF ACTION-PACKED ENVIRONMENTS.
PLATFORMING MEETS FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER.

TEEN
T
Blood and Gore
Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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PSP™

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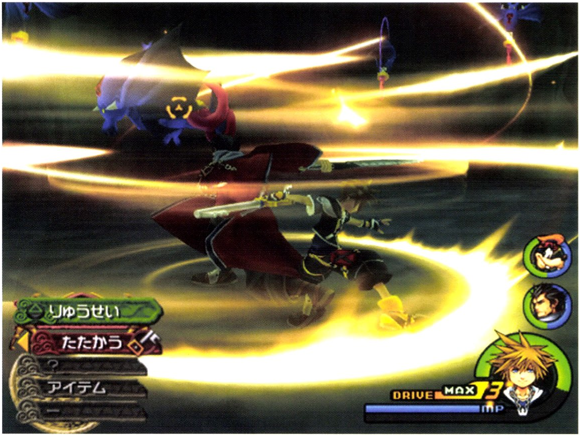


KINGDOM HEARTS 2

THAW OUT UNCLE WALT—HE'LL WANT TO SEE THIS

Even though director Tetsuya Nomura contracted some sort of superflu around E3 last year, he's still plugging away at his many projects, of which *Kingdom Hearts II* might be his most prized—and secretive.

All Squenix would say about the game's story is that it takes place after *Chain of Memories* (the GBA game), with Sora looking for Rikku (from *FFX* and *FFX-2*) while Donald and Goofy look for King Mickey. They're not alone, though: The other person looking for Mickey is his rival, Pete (that big goon originally called "Peg Leg Pete," but, well, that name doesn't fit since he has two legs in later cartoons). Additionally, there are rumors that Hades (from *Hercules*) will serve as the game's main villain, along with those pesky Heartless.

As for the rest of the game, so far we know for sure that it will feature Beast's castle and Hades' underworld, and the developers have recently revealed Mulan's world, with Mulan herself as a party member (whether they use her dragon Mushu for comic relief or as a possible weapon, we're not sure). Other rumored Disney movies that will become game worlds are *The Lion King, The Sword in the Stone, The Black Cauldron,* and even *Robin Hood.* The basic gameplay is the same, with a few tweaks to the battle system.

Pub. Square Enix **Dev.** Square Enix **Release** Q4 2005

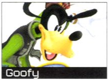
Sora

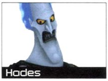
SORA IS BACK WITH FRIENDS OLD & NEW

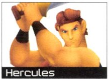
Auron

Chien Po

Donald Duck


Goofy

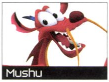

Hades

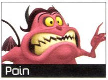

Hercules

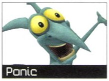
Ling

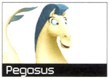
Megara

Mulan


Mushu


Pain


Panic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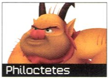
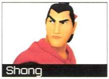
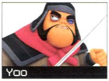

Philoctetes

Ping


Shang

Shan-Yu


Yao

FINAL FANTASY XII

IT'S STILL GOING

Is this game alive? Yes, seriously. At last year's E3, director Yasumi Matsuno was able to talk about the crazy changes he's been making to the *FF* formula. (Replacing *FF*'s reliable active-time-battle formula is the new active-dimension-battle system, a real-time system modeled after *FFXI*'s "you see a monster, you walk right up and start smacking" combat.) However, effecting all these changes is proving to be a lot more time intensive than anyone may have originally thought. A little bit of *FFXII* will be shown at this year's E3, but no one on the development team is actually attending the convention, hence the speculation that they're all busy working hard to make *FFXII* a playable game.

A quick plot summary: The Archadian Empire goes on a crazy world-conquest spree and rolls over the kingdom of Dalmasca. The Archadian army is establishing a new consul in the Dalmascan capital of Rabanastre. Since Vaan—the main character—hates the Archadians because of what happened to his brother Rex (who was killed in the line of duty for the Dalmascan army), he decides to steal from the new consul. During his theft, the Dalmascan resistance, led by Princess Ashe, initiates an attack against the Archadians. The story unfolds from here, but at this point, only Matsuno knows what will happen.

THE BEGINNING
Assuming the introduction is the same, here's how it goes: Dalmascan soldier Rex and his commanding officer Basch protect the Dalmascan king from the Archadians, until Basch kills the king and stabs Rex, who cries out for Vaan.

Pub. Square Enix **Dev.** Square Enix **Release** TBD

ヴィンセント：何が起こっているのか知らんが……、
面倒に巻き込まれるのはごめんだ

FINAL FANTASY VII ADVENT CHILDREN

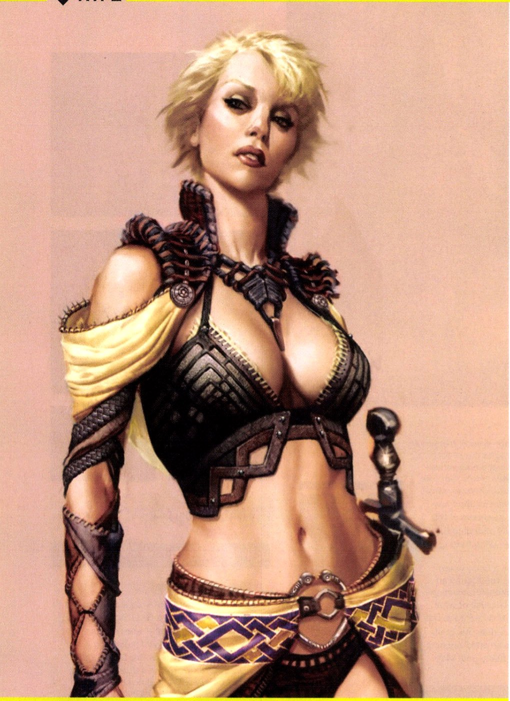
BETTER THAN SPIRITS WITHIN, HONESTLY

A while back, there were rumors of Square working on a sequel to *Final Fantasy VII*—what ended up emerging were no less than four projects that all focused on a post–*Final Fantasy VII* world: *Dirge of Cerberus, Before Crisis, Crisis Core,* and *Advent Children.* While details have been scarce in general, *Advent Children* is easily the most intriguing of the four, as it's a story sequel to *FFVII* and also an honest-to-God movie. The official story summary comments that it takes place two years after the events of *Advent Children* and begins by focusing on a mysterious illness that is spreading rapidly. Cloud Strife, meanwhile, has been busy walking the world when he decides to get back into the heroism business.

Pretty much everyone from the key *FFVII* development team (except for Hironobu Sakaguchi, who's busy making RPGs for Microsoft at his new studio Mistwalker) is on board for this project, with Tetsuya Nomura himself taking the director's chair.

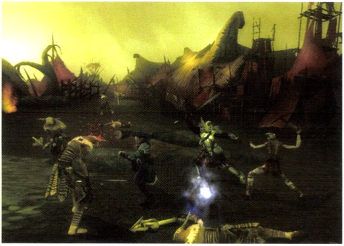
Originally, *Advent Children* was rumored to be a UMD exclusive, but now Squenix is saying that the DVD version of the film will hit stores this fall, with the UMD to follow shortly after.

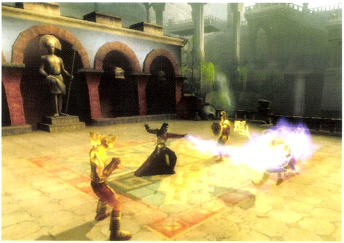
Pub. Square Enix **Dev.** Square Enix **Release** September 13

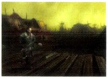


GAUNTLET: SEVEN SORROWS

THE ARCADE CLASSIC IS BACK, AND IT'D BETTER BE GOOD







In the 20 years since its initial release, *Gauntlet* has grown beyond mere "classic" status to achieve a stratospheric level of greatness, one that only a handful of games have managed to reach. Due mainly to its pioneering four-player co-op play, *Gauntlet* has become a game standard, the sort of title that people use to describe and compare other games. *Final Fantasy VII*, *GTA*, and *Metal Gear Solid* are fellow members of this elite club.

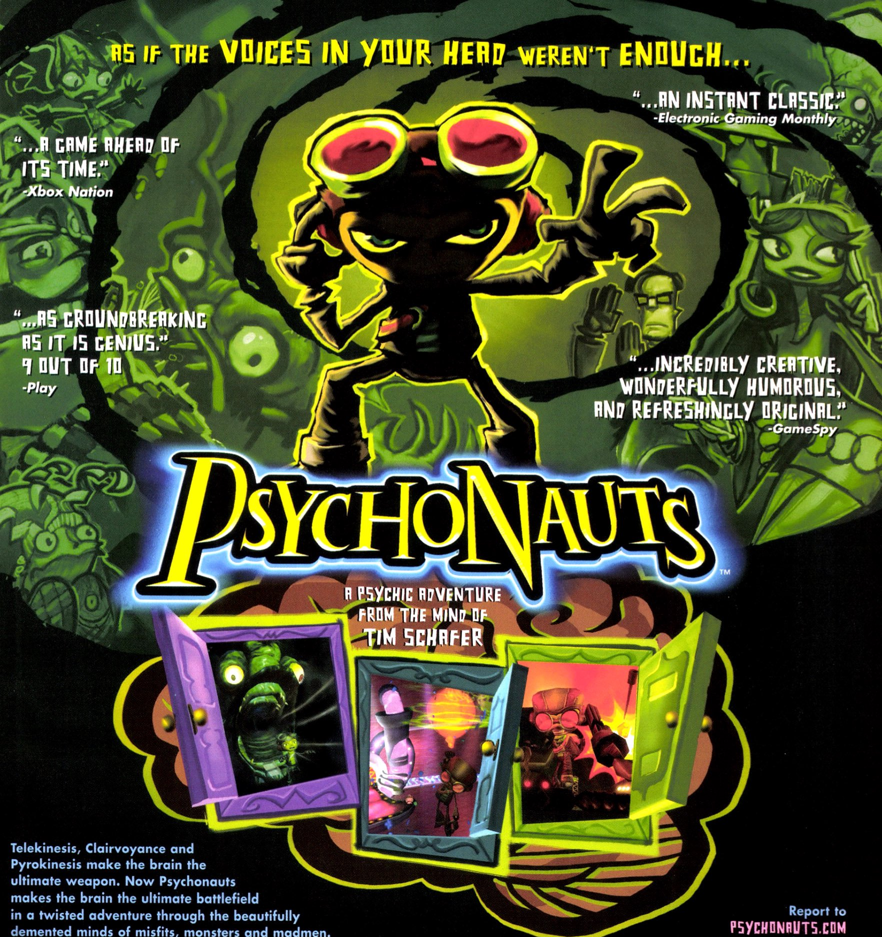
Living up to *Gauntlet*'s mythical status may prove to be Midway's biggest challenge as the company readies *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* for a fall 2005 release. Led by the unlikely team of John Romero (*Doom*) and Josh Sawyer (the excellent *Icewind Dale*), Midway is reimagining *Gauntlet* as an action-RPG that's much closer in style to *Diablo* (a game standard in its own right) than it is to the original *Gauntlet*.

This sounds promising, but will it truly be *Gauntlet* or just another game like it? We're encouraged. The PS2 version of *Sorrows* will feature two- to four-player co-op (with Multitap). The online mode also allows four players, in co-op, as well as the ability to explore on your own. *Sorrows* does follow an intriguing story line having to do with a powerful emperor and the imprisonment of four heroes who must undo the emperor's "lifetime of regrets."

Wait, did we just say four heroes? Yes, the familiar four—a barbarian, Valkyrie, elf, and wizard—will be found in *Sorrows*, with a couple of new characters thrown in.

Plenty of weapon choices, level-ups, hordes of enemies, and familiar hack-n-slash combat within richly detailed fantasy environments add up to a potentially solid—perhaps even terrific—action-RPG. Let's hope *Sorrows* will claim its place as *Gauntlet*'s true heir and not simply steward to that throne. «

Pub. Midway **Dev.** Midway San Diego **Release** Fall


AS IF THE VOICES IN YOUR HEAD WEREN'T ENOUGH...
"...AN INSTANT CLASSIC." -Electronic Gaming Monthly
"...A GAME AHEAD OF ITS TIME." -Xbox Nation
"...AS GROUNDBREAKING AS IT IS GENIUS." 9 OUT OF 10 -Play
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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Cartoon Violence
Crude Humor
Language

PlayStation 2

XBOX

PC CD

MAJESCO

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MERGER MAYHEM

IS NOTHING SACRED ANYMORE?

As the current console generation comes to an end, the videogame industry has been looking toward consolidation as a means to cope with the rising costs of development. Backbone Entertainment (*Death, Jr.*) and The Collective (*Star Wars: Episode III*) have merged to form a new company called Foundation 9, which will be the largest independent developer in North America.

While it makes sense for two smaller independent developers to join forces, the big players are also teaming up. Bandai recently announced it would purchase Namco for $1.6 billion. The deal will make the new company the second largest toy and game manufacturer in the world, right behind Sega Sammy. Both Namco and Bandai see the move as a necessity to compete in the market.

Interestingly, developers and publishers aren't the only ones jumping on the bandwagon. Retailers Electronics Boutique and GameStop announced a merger that will have GameStop paying $38.15 and .78795 shares of GameStop stock for each EB share. Reasons for the merger stem from a desire to breach international markets and to ensure that both retail outlets maintain a strong presence in the North American market in the coming years.

Look for this pattern to continue, particularly after the launch of PlayStation 3, which most speculate will require game budgets significantly higher than those currently being utilized. "This transaction makes a tremendous amount of sense from an operational, cultural, and synergistic perspective," says Jeffrey Griffiths, president of Electronics Boutique. "We will now be in an even better position to broaden our reach." And by "broaden our reach," we assume he means "push even more guides and walkthroughs that people don't want." «

THE WATCHDOG

MOVIES VS. VIDEOGAMES: WHY MOVIES STILL MATTER MORE

JOHN SCALZI is our man keeping an eye on things for the benefit of all gamers. You can see more of his thoughts at www.scalzi.com.

In late April, online columnist James Pinkerton noted that videogames now gross as much as films—and yet videogames, culturally, are still seen as second-tier entertainment. (Pinkerton gives as an example the fact that the Oscars are shown live on broadcast TV, while the Video Game Awards are relegated to that pathetic, backwater excuse for a cable network known as Spike TV—that's my assessment of Spike TV, incidentally, not his.) Given the obvious economic powerhouse status of videogames, their cultural reach clearly ought to be far greater. So what gives?

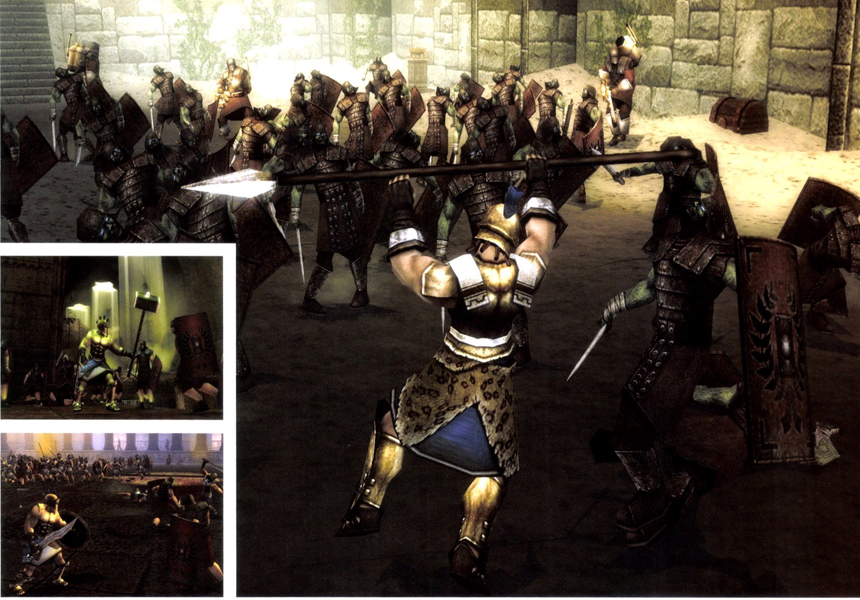
Well, one thing to bear in mind here is that videogames grossing the same amount of money as movies doesn't mean that they're as popular. At about $50 a pop, a videogame costs more than seven times as much as a movie ticket (whose average cost in the United States at the moment is $6.25). When *Halo 2* (released on a console that shall go nameless) grabbed $125 million in sales in the first 24 hours of its release last year, that equated to 2.38 million copies sold. That's an awesome number, but the box office gross of a movie selling 2.38 million tickets on its first weekend is $14 million.

Know what? That's less than what *Catwoman* made its first weekend ($16.73 million, in case you're wondering). That's right—on a purchase by purchase basis, Master Chief was teh pwned by Halle Berry's stinky feline flop. For another perspective, the $114 million opening weekend of *Spider-Man 2* equates to about 18.24 million tickets sold. If a videogame sold those numbers in its first week of release, you'd be looking at a $912 million sales figure. Note also that these figures reflect gross sales before the films' other revenue streams (and, perforce, other obvious indices of cultural penetration), such as DVDs, cable and broadcast TV sales, and overseas sales, are accounted for.

ANOTHER THING TO CONSIDER: WHO ARE THE STARS OF VIDEOGAMES?

Another thing to consider: Who are the stars of videogames? They are either the characters in the game or those who make the games themselves. Well, the characters can't get out and about on their own; they're entirely fictional. You'll never see Solid Snake talking about his latest game on *The Tonight Show* or hounded by paparazzi trying to snap a photo of him snuggling with Scarlett Johansson. Likewise, popular as some videogame creators may be with the hardcore game-geek crowd, Hideo Kojima can walk into any Wal-Mart on the planet without fear of causing a riot, which would qualify as a neat trick for Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie. Speaking of the latter, my mother-in-law, who against my advice owns both *Tomb Raider* movies, was not even aware of the game series upon which the films were based until I mentioned it to her. Suffice it to say that for all of the videogame industry's growing cultural and economic influence, it has many miles to go before it approaches the significance of film.

The videogame industry's closest competitor in the cultural significance rankings? It kills me to say this: books. Yes, really. In both cases, it's the product and its fictional characters that are the stars, and their creators, while notable in their circles, generally cannot hope for the immense fame and/or hot groupie action of even mid-ranking movie actors. And with unfathomably rare exceptions in both cases, the product doesn't truly stake a claim on the cultural consciousness of America until someone in Hollywood makes a movie out of it. Just ask my mother-in-law about that. «



SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR

WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU MIX GOD OF WAR WITH DYNASTY WARRIORS

Every so often we come across a game that, no matter what we see or hear about it, just doesn't click for us until we actually play it. We can ogle the screenshots, sit through a demo, view the trailers and...nothing. An informal poll around the sprawling *OPM* offices revealed *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*, *Kya: Dark Lineage*, and even *MTV Music Generator* as examples of games that have to be played to be truly understood and appreciated.

Sega's *Spartan: Total Warrior* is such a game. Watching it may elicit a shrug; playing it is a different matter entirely. Developed by the Creative Assembly—the studio heretofore known for epic strategy games on the PC such as the excellent *Rome: Total War*—*Spartan* mixes two parts *Dynasty Warriors* gameplay with one part *God of War* intensity for a potentially strong first console outing for the U.K.-based team (recently acquired by Sega).

Here's the scene: Known only as the Spartan, you are an elite soldier graced by the gods with special strength and powers. Your Greek stronghold is under siege by a vast Roman army. As they storm the walls, you take out a few enemies with your arrows. Then comes the fun part. Within the chaos of what appears to be hundreds of soldiers engaged in hand-to-hand combat (the press materials say the game will support up to 160), you must find your mark—a centurion—and take him down. You'll fight your way through dozens of Romans to complete this objective. You must then protect two of your own men as they struggle to place two incendiary devices on some Roman siege towers. After a quick boom, boom, that part of the game is done.

What this brief description can't convey is the sheer adrenaline rush you get playing *Spartan*, and this is only a small part of a game that aims to deliver multiple missions that take you through massive environments, including full-scale cities, dungeons, and mountains. You'll eventually fight your way to the final donnybrook in the Roman Colosseum.

The Spartan himself packs a variety of god-given powers that grow as you progress through the game. One power we were able to try had the Spartan raising his sword to call down a lightning strike that took out about a dozen enemies. Expect a variety of melee and missile attacks, combos, and shield charges. Also, enemies aren't limited to basic soldiers, so watch for a few mythological monsters along the way.

Given *Spartan: Total Warrior*'s roots in decidedly Japanese games such as the aforementioned *Dynasty Warriors* as well as *Onimusha*, it's ironic to learn that this is the first of several games Sega is releasing this year that are calculated to appeal to Western audiences. Still, *Spartan* appears poised to make a mark that's similar to what we've seen from those other games—a fact that may not be fully apparent until you play it. «

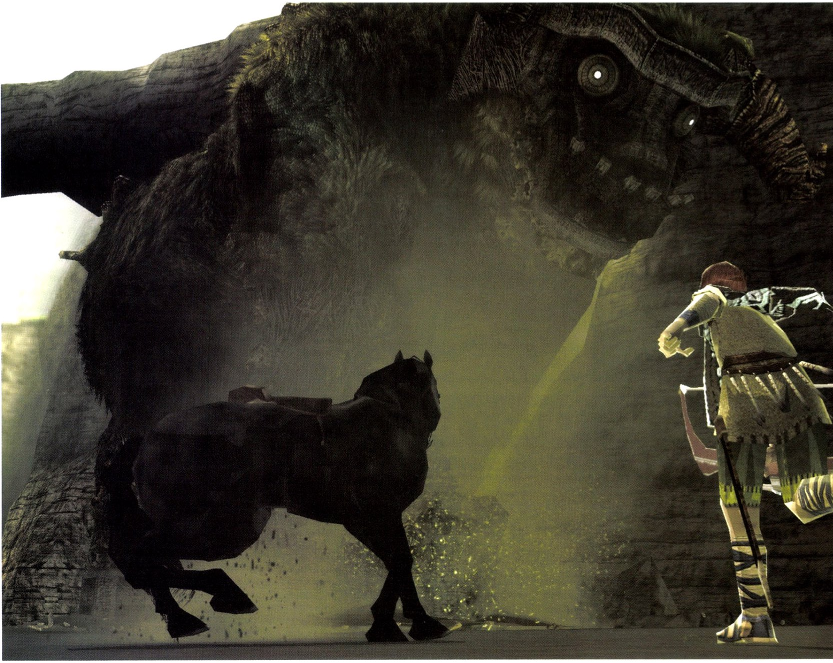
Pub. Sega of America **Dev.** The Creative Assembly **Release** Fall

TOUGH GUYS

In the battle of Thermopylae, legend has it that 300 Spartans were able to hold off a million Persian troops long enough for the Greek army to retreat and regroup. However, historians speculate that it was actually only about 250,000 Persians. Wussy Spartans. More trivia: That battle inspired a scene in *Sin City*.

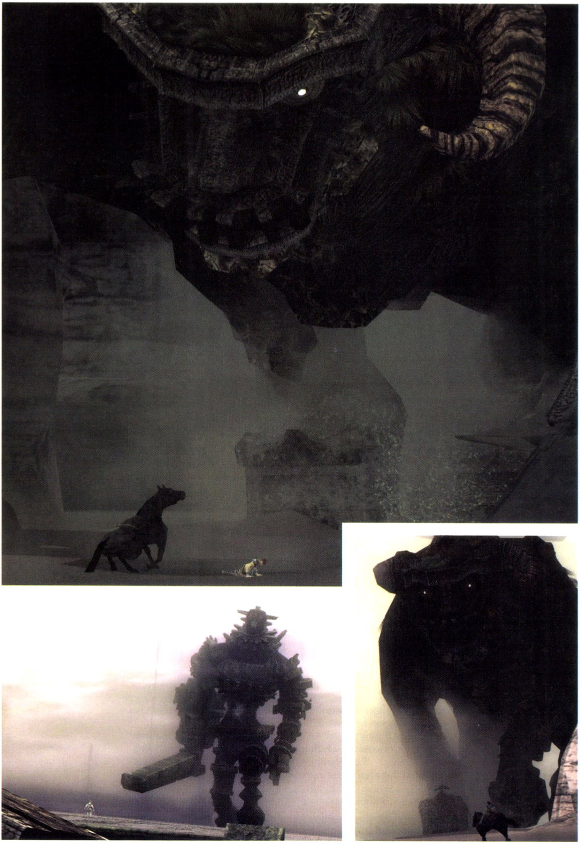
SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

TEAM ICO THINKS BIG, REALLY BIG



ICHI, NI, SAN

More than a year ago, Fumito Ueda's team put the word "nico" on their website. Since "ni" is the Japanese word for two, everyone figured out that they were working on a sequel to *Ico*, which was revealed to be *Shadow of the Colossus.*



A beautiful young woman lies on a stony altar in a comalike sleep, dead all but for the shallow hint of breath she noiselessly exhales. There is no one else around for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miles.

You love her. You want her back in this world with you, back from whatever dark, forbidding place she may be suffering in at the moment. And you know what you must do to get her back.

Find the colossi, every one, and destroy them.

But in order to kill a colossus, you must first find one. Armed with only courage, determination, and a magical sword, you nimbly jump on your horse and ride to an open area. There you raise your blade high, catch a part of the sun, and move your sword until you find the strongest ray of light. Follow that light and you will find your first colossus.

As you ride across a valley—the size and scope of which shouldn't be possible on a PS2—you soon find yourself in a small canyon. It's now a simple matter of climbing up the canyon wall to the top.

It's here you'll find the colossus.

The legends lied. The once-mythical colossus is not as big as a mountain—it's as big as many mountains. How will you, one boy, slay what a thousand armies probably could not?

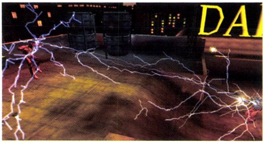
Your sword holds part of the answer. Raise it again to reveal all the weak spots of the colossus. Ah, there! The left calf! Now ride, and ride hard. Get as close as possible to the back of the foot. Has the colossus spotted you? No. Now, quickly, jump and grab on to the back of its foot and climb until you reach its calf. There you will find a soft spot. With sword in hand, you begin stabbing. Stab until the monster's blood starts spewing like the town square fountain.

Aha—the colossus is hurt. He's falling down on his knee! Now begin the ascent to his head. Don't falter; the colossus knows you're there now and is shaking to knock you off. Shockingly, you make it all the way up, where you see another weak spot, right behind his head and just above his neck. You know what to do. Stab. Stab as if your life depended on it. Because it does.

You've just successfully brought down your first colossus. Don't worry, there are only 15 more.

The puzzle-based action game *Shadow of the Colossus* (previously known as *Wanda and the Colossus*) is currently in development by the same team that brought you 2001's strange and ethereal *Ico*, and so far, it is no less mesmerizing. After some much-needed tuning to the controls, *Colossus* is one game we'll be searching for ourselves this fall.

Pub Sony CEA Dev Sony CEA Release September



MARVEL NEMESIS: RISE OF THE IMPERFECTS

PORTABLE SUPERPOWERS

Last month we showed you how EA is bringing a big superhero slugfest to the PS2, but what about the PSP version? Will it be a totally different and unique game, like *Need for Speed Underground Rivals*, or will it be a port of the home console version? It's actually a bit of a port in that it's the same game (with the same simple controls, destructible environment, and so on), but it sports a different character roster, different levels, and uses the PSP's wireless feature for multiplayer.

Joel Manners, producer for *Marvel Nemesis*, explains: "Our main focus for the PSP version of *Marvel Nemesis* was to make sure that the superhero combat was just as cool and as realistic as in any version on any platform. That's the hallmark of *Marvel Nemesis*, and it's the hallmark of the PSP version. On top of that, we wanted to make sure that we were creating a game that was built for the PSP; we respect the fact that gamers play portable games differently than [they do] home console [games]. You need short fixes of gameplay that build toward something bigger, but you also need long gameplay sessions that aren't repetitive so that once you are on the road or on the couch, you have that hour or two-hour game session."

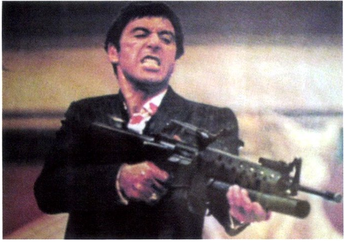
So were there any sacrifices made in compacting all the superheroics onto the handheld? "The good news is that we have not had to sacrifice much to get [it] onto PSP," Manners answers. "There are plenty of things that we have had to do a new way because of the differences in the platforms, but nothing that could be called a sacrifice. For example, obviously one of the most amazing things about *Marvel Nemesis* is the fantastic special effects used for the characters' powers. The PSP would clearly struggle to try and push the exact same effects, so we had to create our own effects to end up with something that looks just as awesome but can also run smooth and fast."

While four of the Marvel characters are still the same (Spider-Man, Iron Man, Wolverine, the Thing), the PSP version also presents a chance to change things up a little. Unfortunately, Manners wouldn't elaborate, but he mentioned that Marvel itself had some input by saying which characters were really popular and recognizable. So expect to see some even more well-known characters that didn't make the cut in the home console versions, as opposed to B-listers such as Dazzler or Northstar (they'll have to wait until *Marvel Nemesis 2*).

THE PSP VERSION PRESENTS A CHANCE TO CHANGE THINGS UP.

Asked what makes the PSP version a good buy for gamers, Manners replies: "It looks fantastic, which is important for a PSP game, with that amazing screen. And obviously, the wireless support is great for a fighting game so that each player can compete in full-screen glory!" «

Pub. EA Games Dev. EA Canada/Nihilistic Release October



PACINO FACE TIME

Despite initially declining the offer, Al Pacino has decided to lend his likeness to the upcoming *Scarface* game from Vivendi. Now you get to wreak havoc on the Miami drug scene as the man himself, although he will not be providing voice work for the infamous Tony Montana. Interestingly, Pacino still hasn't signed on for *The Godfather* game even though fellow high-profile cast members are part of the project. Actors from the film who will be providing voices for *Scarface* include original cast members Robert Loggia and Steven Bauer, plus James Woods and Cheech Marin.

FANTASIES TO GO

Square Enix has released 16 *Final Fantasy* albums that are available for download from Apple's iTunes store, the first time they have been offered for sale in the United States. In addition to the complete soundtracks for each of the games, fans of the long-running RPG series will be able to purchase compilations that include music from the Dear Friends concert, as well as two albums from Nobuo Uematsu's own band, the Black Mages. Who wants to take a bet on whether or not "One-Winged Angel" will become the most-downloaded track within a few weeks?

JAPANTOWN

WHY BOTHER WITH GAMES IF YOU ALREADY MAKE THE HARDWARE?

ANDREW VESTAL
teaches English in the land of our friends to the East, but he still doesn't understand some of their game choices.

Sony Computer Entertainment America recently announced two high-profile titles for late 2005: *Genji: Dawn of the Samurai* and *Shadow of the Colossus*. These two games are somewhat unusual choices for Sony CEA—coming, as they do, from Sony Computer Entertainment Interactive. One might expect the American and Japanese subsidiaries to be as thick as thieves, but really, they've spent the generation traveling wildly divergent paths.

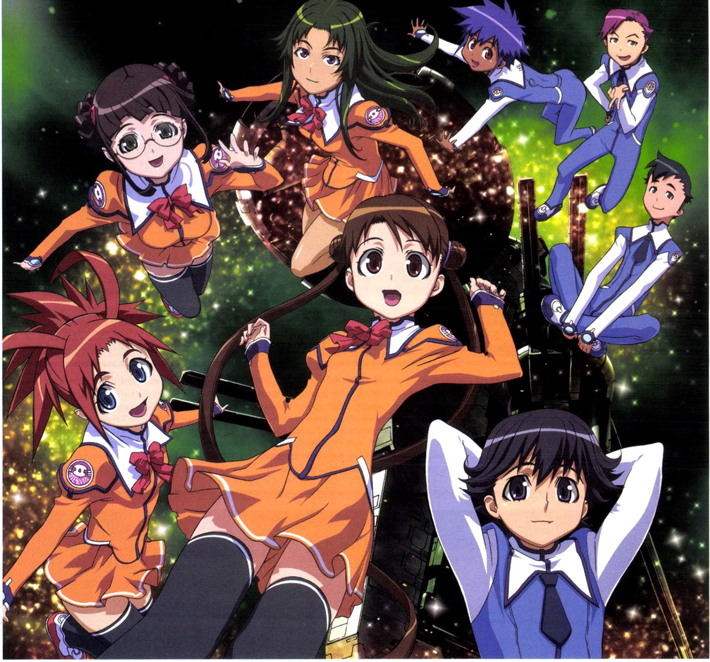
Sony CEA has followed the standard recipe for first-party success: releasing high-budget, mainstream games in established genres that appeal to as broad an audience as possible. *Ratchet & Clank*, *Jak and Daxter*, and *Sly Cooper* put modern gameplay twists on the traditional platformer genre. *God of War* coats its beat-em-up action with seven layers of polish and buckets of blood. *SOCOM* and *SOCOM II* feed the American demand for military shooters. Sony CEA's games have been creative and excellent, but hardly out of the ordinary.

Meanwhile, Sony CEI's output this generation has been...unusual, to say the least. Outside of a few RPGs with rapidly falling stock (*Arc the Lad*, *Wild Arms*), *Hot Shots Golf*, and *Gran Turismo*, Sony CEI's output has been dominated by low-budget art-show games with no clear audience. Take Masaya Matsuura, for example. His *Parappa the Rapper* and *Um Jammer Lammy* were mainstream music hits on the PS1, but his PS2 software lost the plot. Who was the audience for *Mojib Ribbon* (speak-and-spell calligraphy) and *Vib Ripple* (jump around on top of cell-phone photographs)? Sony CEI has also had an obsession with lousy microphone games, giving the world *Yoake no Mariko* (take on the role of an aspiring soap opera actress), *Dekavoice* (a detective adventure game), and *Operator's Side* (Konami released this in the United States as *Lifeline* to 20th percentile reviews). And while there's nothing "wrong" with games like *Ka* and *Bravo Music* (*Mr. Mosquito* and *Mad Maestro!*, respectively), neither game is anywhere near what would generally be considered "first-party quality"—which might be why they were both published in the States by a failed sublabel of Eidos.

SONY IS AN INTERLOPER IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY.

And then there's Sony CEI's *really* weird games, like *Kumauta*, in which you train a polar bear to be an enka (Japanese folk music) singer, complete with gaudy stage outfits and a Stephen Hawking singing voice. And while it's possible *Space Fishermen* satisfied someone's lifelong dream of catching space fish, we're not sure who that person might be.

Sony CEI invented the hardware—so why does its software output consist of unappealing and failed tech experiments? Because it invented the hardware, of course. As some industry vets never tire of pointing out, Sony is an interloper in the gaming industry. Unlike some other companies, its business model doesn't require first-party hits for profitability. Stereo manufacturers don't make their own music; why should hardware manufacturers make their own games? Sony *does*, of course, since it's expected, but more out of a sense of obligation than anything else. The U.S. and European divisions, freed from hardware responsibilities, produce software geared toward their regions' tastes. If Sony CEI needs to fill a slot on its release schedule, it can cherry-pick from the best its sister divisions have to offer. *Genji* and *Colossus* show that Sony CEI is certainly capable of creating first-party quality software. It'd just rather not. «



ANIMANIA

HIGH SCHOOL IN SPACE AND REVENGE IN THE FUTURE

SPACE

During the late-spring lull in quality new releases, before the start of the summer convention season, Geneon's release of *Stellvia* crosses the halfway point, with *Volume 4* already on shelves and *Volume 5* arriving June 14. Though the series looks a bit too sugary at first glance, *Stellvia* has proven to be quite the nifty blend of moderately hard sci-fi and coming-of-age adventures. *Volume 4* concludes the series' first major story line, as a diverse crew of space cadets defends Earth from an onrushing supernova, while *Volume 5* introduces a new set of character arcs and an even greater interstellar threat.

OLD STORY, NEW WAVE

Firing the first salvo of the 2005 licensing season, Geneon Entertainment has picked up *Gankutsuou*, which is widely considered to be one of the best TV shows to air in Japan last year. The first volume of the 24-episode series, which will be released in the United States under the English title *The Count of Monte Cristo*, is tentatively due out in October.

Set in an opulent vision of a future Paris, rendered in gorgeous detail by Gonzo Digimation, the series is loosely based on Alexandre Dumas' famous tale of revenge (*Gankutsuou* is the title the novel usually carries in Japan). Director Mahiro Maeda eventually builds a much different story out of the classic concepts and characters, but it's no less powerful for taking liberties with the basic template.

If you'd like a first look (words don't quite do justice to the visuals), Geneon's packing a trailer with the May 10 release of the *Appleseed* movie. Consumers will be able to choose among three versions, from a $20 basic edition to a $50 deluxe set that includes an action figure and other goodies.

REAL LIVE MONSTER

Naoki Urasawa's manga thriller *Monster* hasn't seen release in America yet, nor has the superb animated TV adaptation (which is currently halfway through a lengthy run on Japanese television). However, it may come Stateside in a completely different form—New Line Cinema has recently announced a deal to coproduce a *Monster* movie project with Japanese publisher Shogakukan.

A sprawling thriller in the tradition of *The Fugitive*, *Monster* follows a Japanese neurosurgeon through a decade of intrigue in Germany. Suspected of brutally murdering a former patient, Dr. Tenma finds himself in pursuit of a serial killer created by the East German military, while a genius police inspector dogs his heels in turn. It's a massive story in manga form, stretching across 18 volumes, so it should be interesting to see what results if the film project comes to fruition.

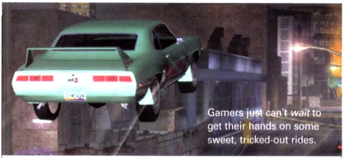
WHILE THEY'RE HOT

May 10 is a big day for new DVDs—aside from *Appleseed*, there's the second *Cromartie High School* volume, the final *Gundam Seed* disc, and the conclusion to *Paranoia Agent*. A week later, Yutaka Izubuchi's excellent postmodern robot series *RahXephon* comes out in a single low-priced box. ArtsMagicDVD tries its hand at the anime market with the first of five volumes of *Salaryman Kintaro*, the hugely popular chronicle of a biker thug gone straight in the corporate world, coming out May 31. Check those out in advance of what's due to be a jam-packed summer schedule. « *Dave Smith*

BY THE NUMBERS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH EB GAMES electronics boutique

SALES, RENTALS, TRENDS, AND ODDITIES—THE STATS THAT SHAPE YOUR VIDEOGAME WORLD


Gamers just can't *wait* to get their hands on some sweet, tricked-out rides.

TOP 20 PS2 SALES

	Title (Publisher)	Score
1	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition (Rockstar)	●●●●
2	God of War (Sony CEA)	●●●●●
3	MVP Baseball 2005 (EA Games)	●●●●◖
4	Lego Star Wars (Giant Int.)	●●●●
5	Dynasty Warriors 5 (Koei)	●●●◖
6	Splinter Cell Chaos Theory (Ubisoft)	●●●●●
7	Major League Baseball 2K5 (2K Games)	●●●●
8	Gran Turismo 4 (Sony CEA)	●●●●●
9	Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga (Atlus)	●●●●
10	MX vs. ATV Unleashed (THQ)	●●●●
11	NARC (Midway)	◖
12	Tekken 5 (Namco)	●●●●
13	Fight Night Round 2 (EA Sports)	●●●●◖
14	Dragon Ball Z: Sagas (Sega)	●●◖
15	Area 51 (Midway)	●●●●
16	Final Fantasy X-2 (Square Enix)	●●●●●
17	Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30 (Ubisoft)	●●●
18	Resident Evil Outbreak: File #2 (Capcom)	●◖
19	Devil May Cry 3 (Capcom)	●●●●◖
20	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 (EA Sports)	●●●●◖

1UP'S 10 MOST WANTED PS2 GAMES

1	GTA: San Andreas	Rockstar
2	FF VII: Advent Children	Square Enix
3	Shadow of the Colossus	Sony CEA
4	Kingdom Hearts II	Square Enix
5	Gran Turismo 4	Sony CEA
6	God of War	Sony CEA
7	SOCOM 3	Sony CEA
8	Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos
9	NFS Underground 2	EA Games
10	Final Fantasy XII	Square Enix

JAPAN'S TOP 10 PS2 GAMES

1	Tekken 5	Namco
2	Mobile Suit Gundam: One-Year War	Bandai
3	Romancing Saga: Minstrel Song	Square Enix
4	Winning Eleven 8: Liveware Evolution	Konami
5	Saint Seiya	Bandai
6	Tengai Makyo III	Hudson
7	Pro Yakyu Spirits 2	Konami
8	Baseball Live 2005	Namco
9	Wild Arms: The 4th Detonator	Sony CEI
10	Shining Force Neo	Sega

TOP 10 PSP SALES

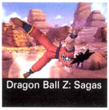
1	Ridge Racer	Namco
2	NFS Underground Rivals	EA Games
3	Twisted Metal	Sony CEA
4	Untold Legends	Sony Online Ent.
5	MLB	989 Sports
6	Wipeout Pure	Sony CEA
7	Lumines	Ubisoft
8	Archer MacLean's Mercury	Ignition Ent.
9	ATV Offroad Fury: Blazin' Trails	Sony CEA
10	THUG 2 Remix	Activision

TOP 10 RENTALS, ALL SYSTEMS

1	Midnight Club 3 (PS2)	Rockstar
2	Midnight Club 3 (XB)	Rockstar
3	Doom 3 (XB)	Activision
4	Splinter Cell Chaos Theory (XB)	Ubisoft
5	God of War (PS2)	Sony CEA
6	Gran Turismo 4 (PS2)	Sony CEA
7	Unreal Championship 2 (XB)	Midway
8	Splinter Cell Chaos Theory (PS2)	Ubisoft
9	GTA: San Andreas (PS2)	Rockstar
10	Star Wars Battlefront (PS2)	LucasArts

Lego Star Wars

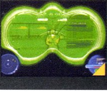
NARC


Dragon Ball Z: Sagas

Resident Evil Outbreak: File #2

Source: EB Games, April 2005. Numbers reflect the sales at EB and its affiliated outlets and don't include other retail outlets. That's probably why you'll never see *Deer Hunter* crack the top 10. Japan's top 10 and the top 10 rentals come from other sources. Game descriptions written by the *OPM* staff. Welcome Aboard sources: Guinness World Records, BBC.com, *Vanity Fair*.

TREND SPOTTER



VISUAL AID
Trying to see in the dark can be really rough. Rather than munching on carrots, the characters from *Killzone, Stolen, Splinter Cell,* and *Syphon Filter* have been turning to more high-tech help.

WELCOME ABOARD

418
The number of passengers that the world's largest hovercraft, the SRN4 Mk III, can carry.

18
The number of golf holes that Duane Hagadone has on his yacht, the *Lady Lola*.

71
The number of days Ellen MacArthur took to make the fastest solo sail around the world.

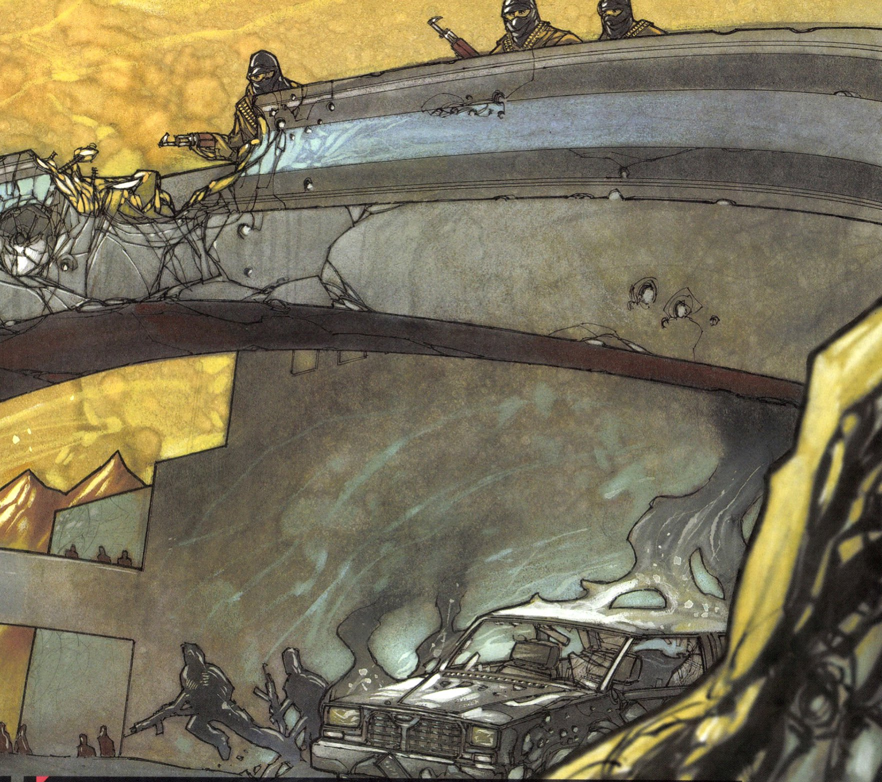
EXCLUSIVE

SOCOM 3'S WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

SOCOM 3'S ONLINE HALF IS NOT WHAT YOU'RE EXPECTING

by Joe Rybicki

Illustration by Nate Van Dyke



It's late in the game, and I am alone.

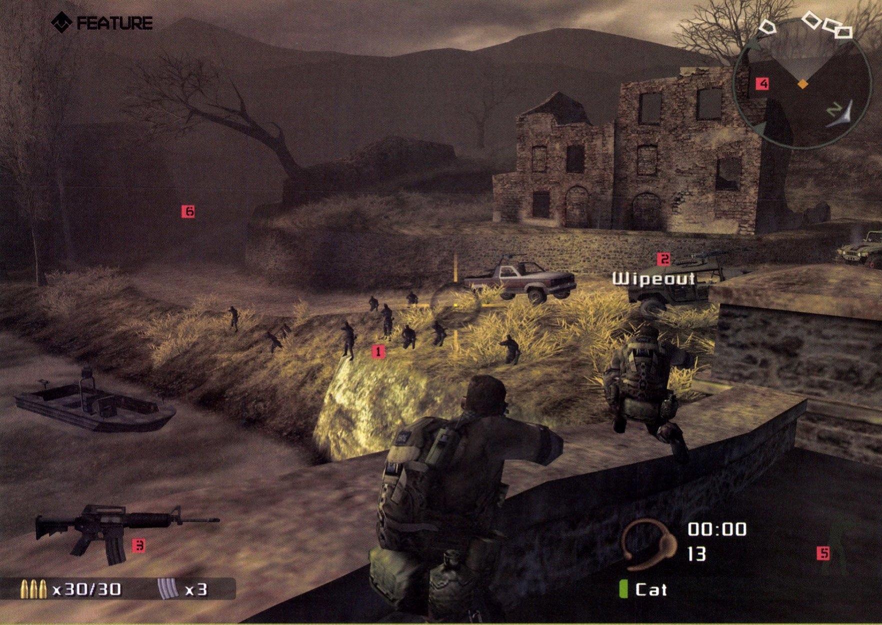
Through a once-in-a-lifetime conjunction of low cunning, ground cover, and sheer dumb luck, I've managed to hold out while every single one of my SEAL teammates has been mercilessly slaughtered at the hands of the terrorist mob. The terrorists, incidentally, have not suffered a single casualty; a few well-placed grenades took out the bulk of our forces within minutes of starting the match, and a number of suspiciously lucky guesses brought the terrorists face-to-face with the remaining SEALs far too quickly. What can I say? They just outdrew us. So now it's just me.

I'm sure my dead teammates are having a field day on the shared channel, yelling at me to get up and move, to do something—anything. I'll let 'em harass me all they want when this round ends, but for now I have plenty of time to contemplate my mortality. I'm well hidden, nestled in the thick grasses that carpet the Polish countryside, comfortably within scope distance of a ramshackle farmhouse that the terrorists are likely to come check out sooner or later. If I'm lucky, I can take out one or two with my M4A1. I attached a high-powered scope and a pistol grip to it during loadout, which make the damn thing heavy as hell—and consequently, makes it harder for me to move quickly—but it shoots straighter and farther than the stock model, so I figured it was worth it. Now I'm wishing I'd swapped the pistol grip for a silencer. There's no way in hell I'll be able to take out more than a couple of the bastards before they figure out where the sound is coming from.

Suddenly, I hear the very last thing in the world I want to hear: an engine. And out of nowhere there's a white pickup roaring over the rise maybe a quarter of a mile away. A white pickup with a big-ass machine gun mounted on the back, two bad guys hanging off the side, and another two in the cab. *Crap,* I'm thinking, *they went all the way back to their start point to pick that thing up.* They knew a set of wheels would help them find me quicker. These guys are smart.

I have no idea how smart. Turns out they sent another group to pick up the Humvee we stupidly left unprotected at our own base. I'm watching the two trucks move methodically across the field in front of me, and I'm wondering why they're not just racing balls-out (that's what I'd do—better chance of a fatal hit-and-run that way), when I suddenly see why: The rest of the group is right behind them. One lonely SEAL against 16 well-equipped and well-organized terrorists—and me fresh out of grenades.

Whoever said war is hell didn't know the half of it.



ONE SWEET RIDE

There's a reason Zipper hadn't unveiled *SOCOM 3*'s multiplayer mode until now: The team knew a sidebar wouldn't be enough, that the multiplayer portion would require a feature-length story all its own—because the rules have changed. The levels are bigger. The options are broader. The vehicles are faster—oh wait, there aren't any player-operated vehicles in *SOCOM II*, are there? Yes, it's a very different game. Back when we first looked at *SOCOM II*, in fact, we brought up the subject of vehicles. "It's the running around in close quarters that makes the design of the maps," producer Seth Luisi told us. "You can't just throw vehicles in there. So if we ever did add vehicles in a future game, it would have to be very carefully done."

It looks like the team has found a way to do it carefully in *SOCOM 3*, because vehicles "are an integral part of the multiplayer game," says CJ Heine, Zipper's lead multiplayer designer. "The maps are designed around supporting the vehicles, around showcasing the infantry-versus-vehicles aspects of the game, really pulling those together." What kind of vehicles? The kind that go "BANG!" really loudly and make large holes in anyone unfortunate enough to be standing in their line of fire. We're talking tanks. Bradley assault vehicles. SOCR attack boats. Multiturret Humvees. Even the civilian-pedigree terrorist vehicles sling some serious firepower via large-caliber machine guns jerry-rigged in unlikely places.

"There is a huge strategic advantage to using the vehicles and coordinating with your teammates," continues Heine, "and they're a very cool aspect of the game. But there's a core group of players who aren't going to want to use them, so we have maps designed just for them."

Nearly half of the new maps, in fact, are designed for those who prefer their *SOCOM* vehicle-free: Five of the 12 maps feature "more close quarters, tight corridors, [with players] engaging each other at key choke points on the map," says Heine. "We didn't want to alienate any of the *SOCOM* fan base by catering only to the vehicles. And we're very careful to make it so that the vehicles don't dominate any of the maps. In a lot of these areas, you'll need to leave your vehicle and perform actions on foot and deal with a lot of the *SOCOM*-style gameplay."

MIX AND MATCH

Are five maps not enough for you old schoolers? Don't worry, you'll be able to disable vehicles in any of the other seven maps. This comes as part of a wholesale restructuring of the game-creation menu. "We've opened up several options for players," Heine says: "They can pick their map, game type, number of rounds, time, day or night, vehicles on or off. And we have a robust system for weapon selection, so you can just limit it to sniper rifles or machine guns…even turn off the 203s [grenade launchers, aka "n00b tubes"] if you want. We've really filled in a lot of the options there."

Wait, pick your game type? Heine nods. "Instead of having one game type on a map," he says, "you can cycle through a bunch of different game types on that map. So if you have a favorite map and you're not happy with the game type on it, you can just swap it out. If you want to play breach instead of demolition, all the options are [available]."

"That makes for a lot of options for map type," says design manager Graham Kays. "We have over 60 map options, with base terrain, game type, and weapons. It gives the players the freedom to choose what kind of game they want to play."

"Along with that, we have respawn variants for all the game types," continues Heine. "If you want to play demolition as a respawn game, where the players keep respawning at regular intervals and try to push that bomb toward the enemy base, that's an option. We changed some of the game types to support that, so it increases the action."

This new customizability, as you might imagine, requires some pretty careful layout of the levels. You need barriers for breach games, bases for

THE NEW LOOK OF SOCOM

1 **More players.** There are 12 players in this screen, and that's not even half the maximum.

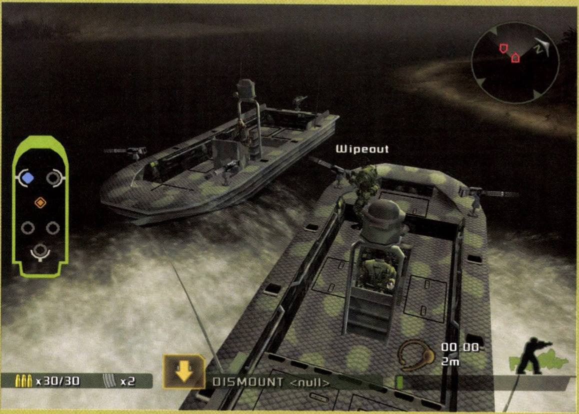
2 **Vehicles.** Available to both sides, these completely change the way the game is played.

3 **Custom weapons.** You can roll your own boomstick, tailoring it to your exact playing style.

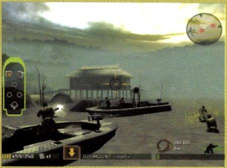
4 **More detailed radar.** It indicates the location of unoccupied vehicles, as well as key objectives.

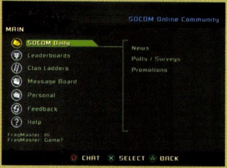
5 **New stance indicator.** It shows at a glance whether you're standing or crouching.

6 **Increased draw distance.** See (and shoot) farther than before.

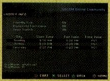


FLOAT YOUR BOAT The Special Operations Craft Riverine (SOCR) is one mean watercraft, sporting two machine guns fore and one aft. With a top speed of over 40 knots and a draft of only two feet, it can navigate inland waterways with ease.





FragMaster: Hi
FragMaster: Game?



LIVE WIRE

SONY ON XBOX ONLINE

Considering the similarities we noticed between *SOCOM 3*'s new online features and those employed by the latest Xbox Live games, we couldn't help but ask if the *SOCOM* team considered Xbox Live a threat to *SOCOM*'s success.

"There are so many things that we can do in *SOCOM* that you just can't do in Xbox Live," says Sony's Seth Luisi, senior producer for the *SOCOM* franchise. "Live is a good service, but it has basic features [that] every game has. The game developers don't have the freedom to do what we're doing; we're expanding the community features tenfold in *SOCOM 3*, and we wouldn't be able to do that with Xbox Live unless we waited for Microsoft to release an Xbox Live update, which would affect all the games—but then we still wouldn't be able to do it our way. I think it's a great service, but it definitely takes away your freedom in developing an online game. And that's something that we've been able to exploit.

"As far as the audience is concerned...you know, *Halo 2* is an extremely popular game," concludes Luisi. "But when it came out, it didn't really affect our online usage at all. We didn't see any drop. It seems like there's a separate audience for Xbox Live [and] *SOCOM*."

demolition, and holding pens for extraction; these features will all be dynamically inserted or removed as the game type requires. But in addition to being able to host different types of games, the levels need to be big enough to support vehicular combat. So the smallest *SOCOM 3* map is about the size of the *SOCOM II* downloadable map Last Bastion (that is, damn big). The biggest is roughly twice that size—and big maps raise their own unique issues. For example, won't members of even a fully staffed team have trouble finding their teammates—or the enemy for that matter?

MISERY LOVES COMPANY

Well, there's just one other little change we haven't really told you about yet. Remember that mention of 16 terrorists in the intro? That wasn't a misprint or creative license. You will now be able to play a *SOCOM* game with 31 of your closest friends. Let that sink in for a moment: 32 players.

"With *SOCOM* and *SOCOM II*, we did 16 players pretty well," says Heine, "[but] we decided to set the bar for ourselves. So we have two teams of 16, and clans now support 32 players. It's a huge battlefield. To help alleviate the pressures on the maps, we have selectable spawn points now, where you can coordinate with your team ahead of time and figure out where you want to spawn to give your team the best strategic advantage on that map."

Strategy and communication have always been the factors that separate the winning teams from the losers in *SOCOM*. But with more space, more players, and more ways of getting around, these factors become even more vital. In the level we played, set in the Polish countryside, we found good lines of sight across the rolling hills (and incidentally, Zipper has managed to push back the view distance further than what you're used to in *SOCOM II*). But there were still plenty of places for the enemy to hide and vastly more territory to cover when hunting someone who didn't want to be found.

Zipper is very conscious of this and is making sure the levels are scattered with landmarks to make it possible for you to quickly and accurately communicate a location to the rest of your teammates. But the team is also developing subtler ways of keeping teams (whose 16 players will almost definitely be spread between vehicle-based squads and on-foot squads) together.

"One of the things we do," says Kays, "in order to accommodate both styles of play—being in a vehicle and being on foot—is that the on-foot routes are shortcuts and the vehicles have to go a more circuitous route around so that the transit times for on-foot players and vehicle players are very similar. So if everyone runs off with a vehicle really quick and you didn't get a chance to hop in one, you aren't left out in the cold."

YOU WILL NOW BE ABLE TO PLAY WITH 31 OF YOUR CLOSEST FRIENDS.

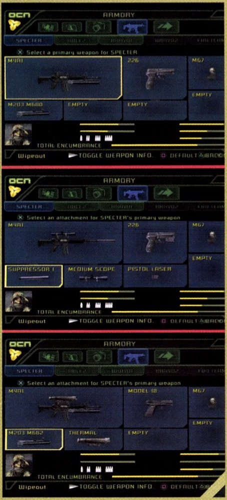
"A lot of the routes," says Heine, "are set up so that you're going to be coming to a choke point at roughly the same time as a vehicle is going to be pulling in around the corner. We've carefully staged some of these things so that there's going to be a lot of interaction."

"And the selectable spawn points are going to help with that as well," continues Kays, "because you'll have a spawn point without a vehicle that's much closer to the enemy, and the vehicle spawn points will be further back, so you have that balance."

"Between having the vehicles to take small groups of people around, the larger maps with more players, and the selectable spawn points," says Heine, "there's a larger element of strategy that hasn't been in the game before. It should be very cool."

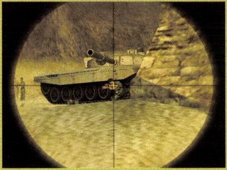
THIS IS MY RIFLE

SOCOM 3 has a completely new armory, allowing you to customize your weapons. Note the differences in these screens: same basic gun, three different configurations.



x2/30
x2
MOUNT
00:00
6

NEW STRATEGY
In online play, teams will now need to work even closer together to coordinate vehicle and on-foot strategies. But you'll need to be extra careful: It is possible to get run over by a vehicle, even one piloted by a member of your own team.



CHANGING THE RULES

Of course, with more space, more people, and new toys to play with, Zipper had to add to the roster of game modes. First up is convoy. "We wanted to create a game type that showcased the vehicles," says Heine. "You start out with two cargo trucks, heavily armored and slow, with no firepower on them at all. And you have to keep these things protected as you drive them through choke points in the map, pick up your cargo, wait while it loads, and then drive it out to the extraction zone." Sounds easy enough. Oh, wait: "Along the way, the terrorists spawn in at key choke points with heavy weaponry." We knew there had to be a catch.

And then the design team decided to capitalize on the greater space offered in the larger maps with a mode called control. "Your team is trying to place markers at these five locations," says Heine. "The team that gets all five first, or the majority when the [timer runs out], is going to win. Most people hear that and think, 'Oh yeah, *Battlefield*—you take over a point and then you have to go and take it back.' What we didn't want was a 20-minute round where both teams are fighting over key locations. This is a much more sped-up game type; once you've placed [a beacon], there's nothing stopping the other team from placing theirs there. It just means that both teams have placed theirs and there's less of a focus to stay in that area." This is a key point to the designers—they want the focus to progressively narrow over the course of a match, with players driving toward only the control points that have not been claimed by both teams (a drive that's aided by marker icons on the players' radar). This way they can help concentrate the action, avoiding the issue of players getting lost. "We didn't want to make *Battlefield*-sized maps," says Heine, "and then have players wander around forever and not find anything."

The five modes that return from *SOCOM II* have also undergone subtle changes. While the fundamental goals of suppression, demolition, breach, and extraction have remained the same, the new factor of selecting your spawn point before the round makes a serious tactical difference. Do you spread out your forces in an attempt to flank the enemy, which puts the smaller groups at risk of getting picked off? Or do you focus on key points and work in close proximity? Heine tells us escort has changed the most: "Despite how *SOCOM II* played, we're actually making it a little more difficult for the escorting team—they're playing against the timer now, whereas before time was on their side." In other words, if the round ends without the VIPs being extracted, it counts as a loss for the escorting team instead of a win as in *SOCOM II*. Ouch.

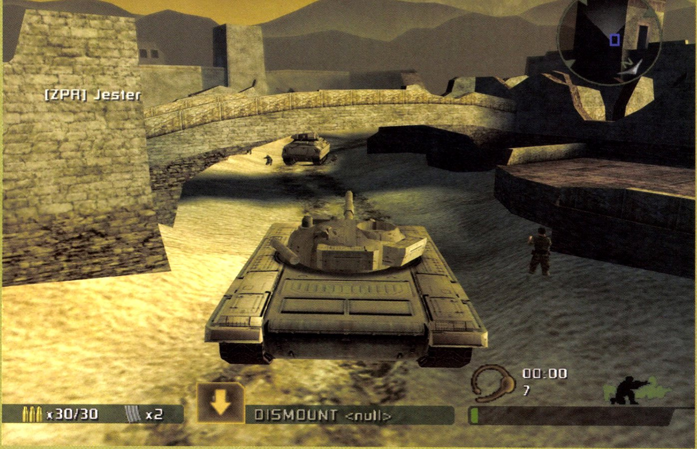
PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

If you've played much *SOCOM II* online, we know exactly what you're asking yourself now, and we asked Zipper the same thing: With 32 players, how on God's green earth are you going to make the game run smoothly? Many players gave up on *SOCOM II*'s online play due to lag issues—with twice as many players and twice as much area in a level, won't the lag be twice as bad?

Zipper's tech-heads are as concerned as you are—but they're confident they can make it work. "We're a lot more careful about how many messages we're tracking back and forth," says Heine. "We're rewriting some of the network code."

Brian Soderberg, Zipper's vice president of technology, elaborates: "We're working hard at trying to compress things—the information per character or per vehicle—trying to make that smaller. We've also built this elaborate tool to sniff out packets and really just play the game and evaluate what's going on, to get a better look at what causes the problems and where the bottlenecks are, and then fix it."

In addition to rewriting the network code, the designers are changing the way levels are created, breaking them up into individual "islands." "Since we have these islands," says Soderberg, "we don't actually have



Cextion
Silencer
[M] Hachiroku

BANGLADESH SPEAKS OUT

SOCOM ACCUSED OF "TECH-TERRORISM"

If you've been following the development of *SOCOM 3*, you probably remember that one of the original areas of operation was going to be Bangladesh. Turns out folks in Bangladesh weren't too pleased about that. In April, the country threatened to sue Sony for allegedly portraying Bangladesh as "a terrorist state."

This "was never the case," says senior producer Seth Luisi. "Since day one with the franchise, we made the decision that we never wanted it to be about terrorist states or evil countries. It's about the SEALs going up against terrorism and terrorist groups. And each country depicted is always in cooperation with the SEALs and the U.S. military's action to take out those terrorists—they're never sponsoring the terrorists or doing anything to promote terrorism. So I think most of us look at this as an unfortunate misunderstanding based on limited facts."

The result: The area of operation will now be called "South Asia," and any references to Bangladesh will be expunged from the final game.

to send [information] to everybody. So if we know someone is isolated on a different island, we can filter that out and actually reduce the amount of traffic that's being pushed around."

"By spreading out the spawn points and giving players vehicles," says Heine, "we're also encouraging people to spread apart more, which also takes the load off the server. So you have [fewer] high concentrations of players moving around, which is what usually causes those problems."

"We're still in the process of [rewriting network code] right now," admits Soderberg. "There's still optimizing to be done." Truth be told, the multiplayer game is currently running very, very slowly, but we remember our experience with the first *SOCOM*: When first shown, the game ran ridiculously slowly with a horrible framerate, even in single-player mode. Zipper has taught us not to jump to conclusions about how the final product will turn out.

FAME AND FORTUNE

It's obvious at this point that Zipper has been listening to *SOCOM* fans, but the designers also appear to be keeping tabs on the market as a whole. This is nowhere more evident than in the new community-building features. Consider the new message center: This system for managing buddy lists, clan invitations, chat messages, and in-game e-mails—a system that's accessible from anywhere in the game—bears a notable resemblance to the way Microsoft's Xbox Live works. Of course, *SOCOM 3* isn't just aping a successful formula; the game will also feature "*SOCOM* Daily," a centralized hub featuring in-game message boards, surveys, feedback forms, and other community features. (Incidentally, one other high-level change has been the addition of a "quick login" option on the game's Main menu. You can now turn on your PS2, hit a button as soon as the game loads, and you're online.)

Even more notable is the fact that everyone's statistics will be viewable online. That is, they'll be viewable through the Internet, via a PC, with any Web browser. And there will be plenty to read over; the game now tracks 99 statistics, from the number of times you've earned MVP honors to the number of times you've brutally murdered a teammate. The similarities to the way Bungie tracks *Halo 2* stats are undeniable.

But here too *SOCOM 3* will go further, allowing in-depth searches for specific types of players, as well as offering the ability to sort the online leaderboards by specific stats. Want to see the most valuable player in the whole *SOCOM 3* universe? Just sort by MVP. Looking to find the best marksman in the world? Sort by hit percentage. You get the idea.

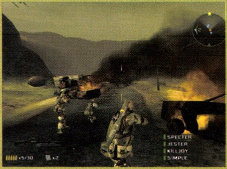
WHEN YOU START OUT, YOUR RANK WILL BE BASED ON EXPERIENCE.

Don't worry, though, if you don't want your performance to be scrutinized so closely. When joining or creating a game, you'll be able to choose whether you want an official ranked game or something more casual. As with *SOCOM II*'s respawn-enabled suppression mode, *SOCOM 3*'s respawn variants will not be judged, but you'll have the option of exempting any game from affecting your rank—not just respawn games.

And changes have been made to the scoring system as a whole, too: When you start out, your ranking will be based exclusively on experience. You will stay within the "enlisted ladder" until you've participated in enough games to play with the big boys, whereupon you'll be promoted to the "officer ladder," which combines that experience with the chess-ranking system *SOCOM II* players are familiar with—except with a greater number of ranks, 11 in all. "We wanted to give the players a sense of progression through the multiplayer world," says Kays. "You're not just

SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE
x12/12
x2

SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE
x16/30
x2



WATER WORLD
You can now fully immerse yourself in the many bodies of water in *SOCOM 3*—in single- and multiplayer modes. You'll swim on the surface, with the option of diving under for limited periods of time to avoid detection.

SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE
x22/30
x2

SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE
x13/30
x2

SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE
x12/30
x2

thrown into the mix right away, but you feel like you're making progress. And there's more stratification within the officer ladder—we've expanded into all the Navy officer ranks—so that you don't feel like you're in this big chunk [with everybody else]. You're getting more candy along the way."

GROUP DYNAMICS

The biggest change to the *SOCOM* community, though, is in the way the game handles clans—and not just because the clans are bigger. "We have a whole system of challenges now," Heine tells us, "where we set up schedules and maps and autogenerate rooms for only those clans to join, so there're no passwords being sent around—it's a very streamlined process of setting up the match, going in, playing, and getting out."

And these changes aren't restricted to just the clan-battle interface. "The clan challenge system is based on challenging a clan and taking their spot," says Heine. "So let's say you're ranked No. 10 and you're challenging the No. 1 clan. If you beat them, everybody [above you] is going to slide down one spot and you'll take that No. 1 position. We prevent players from coming in at the bottom and challenging the top by only allowing you to challenge within a percentage of the total clans playing. So if there are 1,000 clans registered, say, you'll only be able to challenge up to 50 spots above you. So you have to work your way up.

"If you don't win," he continues, "you retain your existing spot, but we don't allow you to challenge the clan that you lost to for a period of time. This prevents players from essentially locking up sections of the ladders; the No. 1 and No. 2 clans won't be able to continually challenge each other to stay on top."

But it's not just the ranking system that's changed—it's the whole organization. When you start a clan, you'll choose among available ranking ladders that are customized for specific clan attributes. For example, if your clan has only four players, there will be a 4-on-4 ladder. Or say you want to play only no-vehicle matches; there should be a ladder out there for you. The ladders will also be organized by schedule based on the times your clan is available to play. This is significant because you can be challenged to a clan match at any point within your ladder's "live" hours—and declining a challenge counts as a forfeit.

Now, don't panic too much; there's an option for mutual cancellation in which neither team changes position...but you'll both have to agree to it. Sounds like a recipe for cutthroat competition, doesn't it? That's by design. "People are going to be changing ranks constantly on here," says Heine, not without a certain relish. It also may sound like a recipe for player abuse, but Zipper has foreseen this as well. The game will include an extensive feedback system, even going so far as to allow players to message community managers directly with player complaints or game issues. "Players have all sorts of ways they can interact with us," says Heine, "which is really cool."

ONLY CHANGE IS PERMANENT

If we were to try to sum up Zipper's approach to *SOCOM 3*'s online play in two words, they would be these: Nothing's sacred. The teams and levels have doubled in size. Vehicles have been added. Familiar game modes have been tweaked. Ranking has been overhauled. The clan system has been practically rebuilt from scratch. This is not a design team that's afraid of change.

And yet, it's important to note that with all the options for customization that *SOCOM 3* is introducing, longtime *SOCOM* fans will still be able to play a game that's very similar to what they're used to. "There's just way more variety," says Soderberg. "There's lots of flexibility to set up missions in different ways. So we can keep the old *SOCOM* diehards playing like they [are], but there's tons of new stuff to try out."

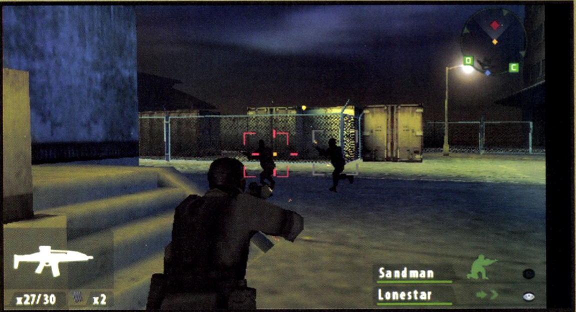
Kays nods vigorously. "It's all about the options," he says. "We're

HIT THE ROAD
Vehicles will be everywhere in this game, available to both SEALs and terrorists. So far we've seen two Humvee models, pickup trucks, Bradley assault vehicles, two different boats, and a tank...and we're expecting even more.

SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE
x2

SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE
x2

SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE
x25/30
x2



FIRETEAM BRAVO

YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU

"There's just one more thing we want to show you," says Chia Chin Lee, executive producer for *SOCOM* at Zipper. "It's just down the hall." He leads us into a dark, tiny room in a secluded corner of Zipper's sprawling offices. "See, there's this new hardware that just came out." And he puts a PSP in our hands. And it's running a *SOCOM* game.

This is *SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALs—Fireteam Bravo*, a *SOCOM* side story set to release in November. Featuring the same three areas of operation as *SOCOM 3* (Poland, Morocco, and South Asia), plus an exclusive area based in Chile, the game puts you in command of a two-man squad working concurrently with the primary team in *SOCOM 3*. Now, you're probably wondering, How on earth can they make *SOCOM* work without a second analog stick and four shoulder buttons? The answer: very carefully.

While the game looks as crisp and clean as the PS2 *SOCOM*s—and runs every bit as smoothly—the controls have been simplified for the PSP. Instead of aiming manually (a feat that would prove prohibitively difficult with such a small screen), players use the shoulder buttons to lock onto targets. The accuracy of the shot will depend on factors such as the character's stance, movement, and line of sight: try to run-and-gun and you'll be all over the place, but move as stealthily and carefully as you would in the PS2 games and you'll hit body mass. If you need to take a precision shot, you can switch to "mouse-look" and aim with the analog nub. The lock-on feature will undoubtedly make this a more action-oriented experience, but from what we saw, it is still very much a *SOCOM* game... just a little quicker.

We're most curious to see how the lock-on feature will change the multiplayer game. Sony's keeping mum on the specifics, but it did confirm a multiplayer mode; we're guessing the game will support both ad hoc and infrastructure play. Also up in the air is the issue of connectivity with *SOCOM 3*; Zipper hinted at some kind of PSP-to-PS2 interaction, but the studio is waiting to release details at a later date. But really—it's a *SOCOM* game that you can take with you everywhere. What more do you need to know?

Pub. Sony CEA **Dev.** Zipper Interactive **Release** November

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going to have just as many opportunities for players to play *SOCOM* as they've played before, only we're adding all these new options. So it's expanding the availability and letting players decide what they want to play and how they want to play."

"That's one of the key things for the franchise in general," says lead designer Travis Steiner. "It really caters to all sorts of different gamers who have different styles and different preferences. We're just multiplying that. Am I going to be the driver, the gunner, the sniper? You just have so many options of how you want to play. "

"Our whole idea for multiplayer is always to evolve it, expand the world, and create new experiences," says Luisi. "We're always trying to retain all the elements that we feel make it a good game, but we don't want to keep creating *SOCOM II*.

"We still have a lot of hardcore people out there who say that *SOCOM* was the best experience," Luisi says, "and we really ruined *SOCOM II* by changing things. But in *SOCOM* we had 13,000 simultaneous users, and in *SOCOM II* we have 35,000 simultaneous users. So I think the bigger audience is receptive to these changes, and we're always trying to make it a better game and one that people can keep playing."

Of course, online play is only half of the game....

THE OTHER HALF

We're back in Poland—me, Jester, Killjoy, and Simple—the four musketeers together again. We're inserting into a narrow valley that I don't much like the looks of. Big, old trees mean lots of wood to hide behind, and the ground is covered with some of the thickest greens I've ever had the misfortune of wading through—we're talking some real *Land of the Lost* business, and I'm guessing there's more under there than field mice.

No help for it, we've got to go through. And I ain't counting on an easy ride. "Bravo," I drawl (it's all about confidence), "fire at will."

"Roger that." A twig snaps. We freeze. You know, suddenly the neighborhood feels a lot less friendly. On an impulse I switch to thermals, and there're orange blobs moving everywhere. I mean, *everywhere*—and they ain't field mice. I take careful aim. Then all hell breaks loose.

We've got four tangos coming in at 12 o'clock, with at least one each at 10 and 2. We focus on the main force, drop one. Drop two. The other two duck and cover, which buys us some time. I flip off the thermals for a second—and there's nothing but green out there. It's like these guys have gone all *Predator* on us, but I know they're just hiding under ferns and behind logs. Speaking of which, I flip the thermals back on just in time to discover that Mr. Ten O'Clock is practically crawling up my 6. The bastard belly-crawled around me while I was taking care of business, and his *przyjacie* on the right is in the process of trying the same maneuver. Meanwhile, Front and Center have apparently called for reinforcements.

"OUR WHOLE IDEA FOR MULTI-PLAYER IS ALWAYS TO EVOLVE IT."

This place is jumping, these guys are smart, and we can't see a damn thing without thermals aside from the occasional muzzle flash. It's clear my squad is getting panicked—hell, I'm not exactly floating on a cloud myself—and we're starting to break formation, spinning, trying to get a bead on the tangos. Oh, and look, one more piece of good news: The reinforcements have arrived. Four panicked SEALs against eight well-armed and well-hidden terrorists. And me fresh out of grenades.

But then, I suppose this is a story for another time. «

Pub. Sony CEA **Dev.** Zipper Interactive **Release** September

Fruit Rings
Fruit Rings
FRUITY
KITTY
PEBBLES
HONEY
BUZZ
1
2
3
Honey and Nut
OatsyDotes

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FRUITY KITTY PEBBLES
okay
SQUIRLY PUFFS
They're CRAZY GOOD!
Honey & Nut Toasted Oats
HONEY BUZZ
WESTERN FAMILY Corn Flakes
PRETTY okay
LINDA
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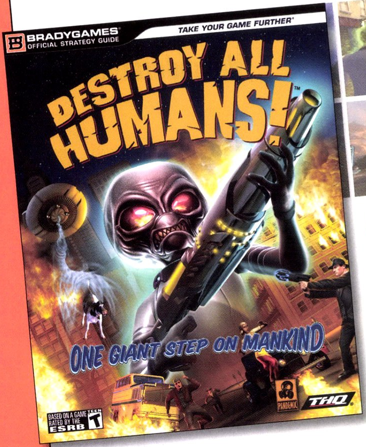
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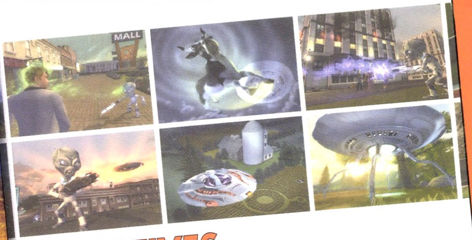

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REVIEWS

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FIFA
GET YOUR KICKS

RATING KEY
Octagons. Stomps. Ocs. Blargs. Call our rating symbols what you will—just know that any game that receives five of 'em is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 2.5 is merely mediocre. And a 0.5? Well…at least they're fun to rip apart.

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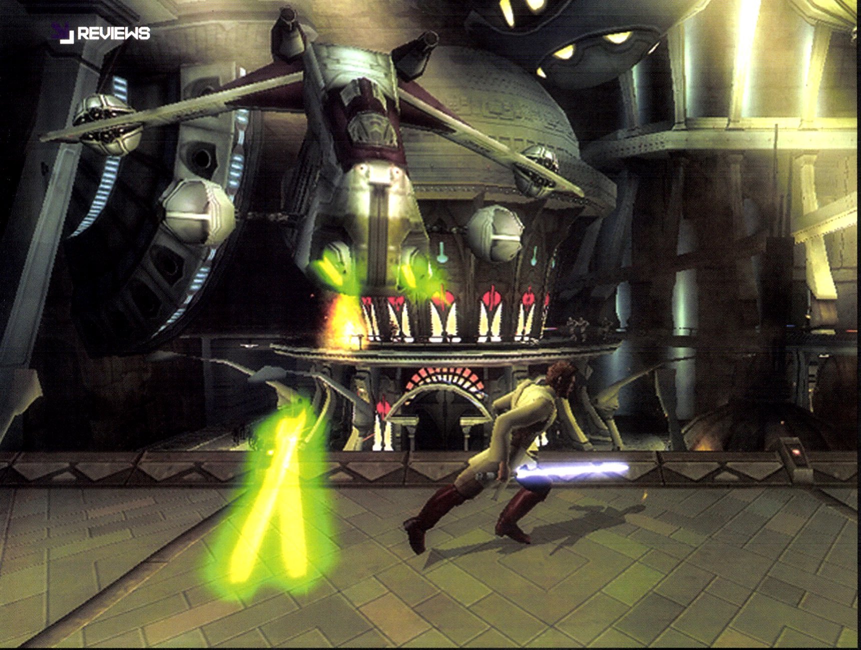


STAR WARS EPISODE III:

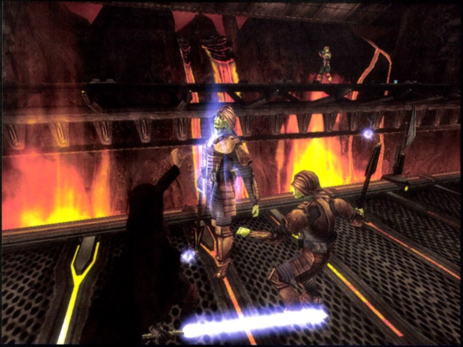
FORCE FED

For more than a quarter of a century now, *Star Wars* fans have eagerly awaited Anakin Skywalker's transition from whiny Jedi Knight to wheezing Sith Lord. With that in mind, a good portion of these same fans will buy the game adaptation of this event regardless of its quality. I could ramble on about my toaster not working or how you shouldn't leave chicken out of the freezer for too long, and it wouldn't really matter. But for the sake of the people sitting on the fence, you only really need to know this: *Episode III* won't change your mind about the quality of console *Star Wars* games in recent years.

At times, it feels like it comes close, particularly during the 1-on-1 Jedi battles, but the rest of the game is really just a mixture of standard and often sloppy *Star Wars* gameplay mechanics. The 1-on-1 battles are quite good, almost enough to stand on their own. While you won't get the level of depth seen in focused fighting games, the Jedi fights actually require some thought and skill in the form of a balanced Force and lightsaber attack. If you just mash buttons, your foes in these battles simply sit back and block most of the time, so you basically have to find a way to break open their defenses. However, there are some weak points. Maneuverability is somewhat an issue. Sidestepping attacks and then launching into a counterattack can be pretty difficult, simply because it takes a split second to kick into the sidestepping animation before actually executing the action, and if you're a fighting-game fan, then you know that timing is a huge factor. This same problem is readily apparent when trying to jump. Eventually, you kind of get the hang of it and learn to sidestep or jump a second or so before you actually want to—if that sounds lame, well guess what, it is!

The general action sequences in *Episode III* don't require quite as much finesse. Some frantic lightsaber swinging is good enough to take care of most enemies. As you get into the later levels, enemies become a little more adept at blocking, but almost to the point where it just makes combat totally not fun. Imagine whaling on an enemy that blocks 90 percent of the time and is resistant to most Force attacks—battles like this are incredibly tedious and do a great disservice to what is otherwise a good fighting system, and unfortunately, there are a whole lot of them in the game.

Thankfully, in most cases you have the option to bypass these kinds of battles entirely if you manage to find a switch that opens a door or cables powering a force field, but there is a penalty. If you avoid fighting too many enemies, then you don't get as many chances to level up your Jedi abilities or basic attacks. At the same time, aside from Force healing, leveling up your skills doesn't have a huge impact, or if it does, it's not really that noticeable. Sure, you might see a new move here and there, but



LEGO OF MY FORCE, JERK

If you want to have a truly entertaining *Episode III* experience, then we recommend that you check out *Lego Star Wars* instead of *Episode III*. Yeah, the characters are Legos, but the combat is simple and fun. Plus, some of the levels are even better than those found in *Ep3*.

REVENGE OF THE SITH

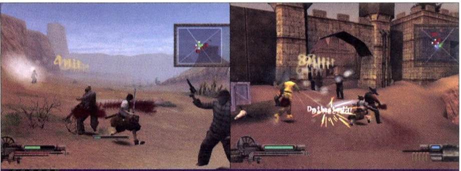
there's never any point where you feel as though you've genuinely powered up. One exception is when Anakin makes the jump to Darth Vader and gains the Force lightning ability, but even that seems weak at times. This guy is supposed to be "The Chosen One," yet he can be easily defeated by some brutish lizard with a club. The same goes for Obi-Wan—neither of the two main playable characters really gets a chance in these sequences to show what being a Jedi Knight is all about. There are times when you can decimate some of the more powerful enemies, but that appears to be a result of a bug of sorts that makes it difficult for enemies to stand up after being knocked down.

Plus, you'd think Jedi would have the ability to manipulate a camera into a useful position. The camera generally does an adequate job of staying focused on the action, but it has a tendency to move into awkward areas, making it difficult to keep track of where enemies are. It's too bad because so many relatively minor problems such as this overwhelm almost all of the good aspects of the game. Fortunately, the 1-on-1 fighting sequences are there to save it, but it would've been great if there were more of them and less of a focus on the average action sequences. If anything, it would've made the game last longer than the five hours it takes to beat it. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS An entertaining combat system
CONS Usual *Star Wars* gameplay mechanics, around five hours long

Pub. LucasArts **Dev.** The Collective **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING ●●●○○



SAMURAI WESTERN

WHEN EAST MEETS WEST

Atlus has carved quite a unique niche for itself as the publisher that's not afraid to release slightly offbeat games on American shores. *Samurai Western* is another example of a game you'd never expect to come out in the States. A Japanese samurai finds himself wandering the Old West in search of his prey; when some gun-slingin' outlaws try to put the foreign swordsman out of commission, much bloodshed ensues.

Samurai Western is a very straightforward action game, in which you basically run around multiple levels doing the same thing over and over again: slicing up stereotypical Old West outlaws as they do their best to ventilate you with their six-shooters, shotguns, and tommy guns. Every now and then a more powerful boss character gets in on the action.

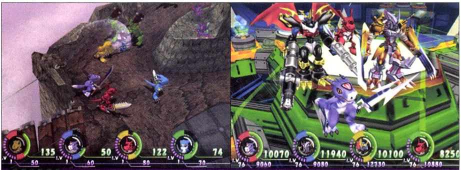
Does that sound like it could get a bit boring after a while? Well...it does. But to be fair, *Samurai Western* does a good job of staving off your growing temptation to put down the game and, say, take a nap. An RPG element is at work here: Earning a high score on a level actually gives you attribute points and new items that can build up your offense, defense, etc. I *do* have to take issue with the graphics—PS2 games have been looking quite good lately, which makes the rather dated graphics here even more noticeable.

It would be easier to recommend *Samurai Western* if Atlus was releasing it as a $20 budget title. But at full price, there's just not enough variety here to justify the purchase for most people. « *Greg Sewart*

PROS No-frills action, nice control
CONS Very little variety from level to level

Pub. Atlus **Dev.** Acquire **ESRB** M **MSRP** $39.99

RATING ●●●○○



DIGIMON WORLD 4

LAME TRADING-CARD CHARACTERS CAUSE REPETITIVE STRESS

The prevalence of knockoffs is amazing: MS Windows (Mac OS), Coldplay (U2, Jeff Buckley), *Napoleon Dynamite* (*Rushmore, Freaks and Geeks*), store-brand cereal (name-brand cereal), Chicago (NYC), and on and on. Original ideas are such a rare commodity that most products and media we consume are, in some form, stolen.

In the world of videogames, copycats are divided into two camps—those who take an idea and run with it, often outdoing the original (*Splinter Cell*), and those who hope to kick a clone out the door before the latest trend is over (*True Crime*). *Digimon* falls into the latter camp, a product line so indebted to the *Pokémon* franchise it copied the last half of its name.

The series sets its sights on a couple of other prime "inspirations" for *Digimon World 4,* namely *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* and RPG-ish hack-n-slashers like *Diablo* and the newer *Gauntlet* games. The result is predictably mediocre, a no-frills dungeon crawler featuring *Digimon*'s most recognizable characters (who aren't that recognizable). You and three buddies pick monsters, get gear in order, and plunge into battle. Combat is incredibly simple, mostly hacking away with a single move. The enemies don't differ much in attack styles, settling into predictable, repetitive patterns. Item management is a real mess—it forces you to return to the hub level to change weapons, a serious pain.

I really tried to understand the appeal of *Digimon,* but the bland little scamps just rub me the wrong way. *Digimon World 4* won't convert anyone who doesn't already get it. « *Robert Ashley*

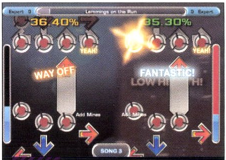
VERDICT Only those brainwashed into the Digicult will enjoy themselves.

Pub. Bandai **Dev.** Bandai **ESRB** E **MSRP** $29.99

RATING ●●○○○

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

RedOctane got its start renting games over the Internet—years before Netflix or Gamefly. The company still does rentals, in addition to making oddball peripherals and, now, games.



IN THE GROOVE

NOT THE EASIEST GROOVE TO GET INTO

Do you like dancing games? I mean, do you really, *really* like dancing games? RedOctane, manufacturer of serious dancepads and other niche peripherals (including a staggeringly hardcore *metal* dancepad for home use) has jumped into the game design arena with *In the Groove,* adding a ton of new features to the standard dance-game formula. The question is, do these new additions matter?

For most people, the answer is likely to be no. The *Dance Dance Revolution* line beats out *ITG* in terms of presentation, ease of use, and song selection (with Konami's money behind them, the *DDR* games include a ton of familiar licensed tracks), which seem to me to be just about all the casual player would really care about. *ITG*'s workout mode is much more heavily customizable, which may be a draw for many newcomers, but in terms of basics, *DDR* still reigns supreme.

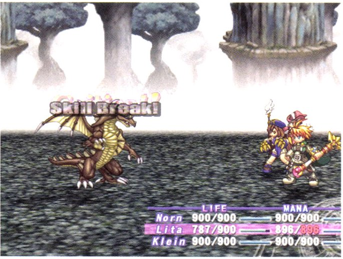
But for those of you who go through a dancepad or two a year—you know who you are, you crazy bastards—you're likely to get a serious jolt from *ITG*. This is very obviously a game designed for the hardcore: Before starting a song, you can set a pantload of options, from arrow-scrolling speed and direction to crazy effects like spinning, invisible, or reversed arrows. You can even add mines (which deplete your health if you step on them) to make things more challenging. These options allow you to tweak the game's difficulty level, which is a nice touch if you're too good for the hard level but haven't quite got your footwork to the expert level. In addition to these options, the game itself is a bit more challenging, forgoing *DDR*'s easy-to-recognize patterns for a more fluid, dynamic set of steps.

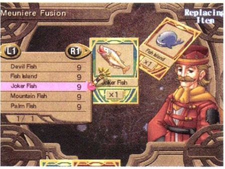
The result is that, while it may not be the ideal dance game for newcomers, *In the Groove* should please dance freaks looking for something a bit more serious than *DDR.* In the end, RedOctane is continuing what it's been doing all along: making hardcore fans of niche markets happy. « *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT There are better dance games for newcomers or casual fans, but this is *the* game for the hardcore dance community.

Pub. RedOctane **Dev.** Roxor **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING ●●●◐○





Crystallize
L1
R1
Nymph
LOVE So-so
ENERGY Super

ATELIER IRIS: ETERNAL MANA

CUTER THAN YOU CAN STAND, MORE FUN THAN YOU'D EXPECT

You've got to hand it to Nippon Ichi Software. The company—creator of *Disgaea, La Pucelle: Tactics*, and *Phantom Brave*—certainly knows how to mine its niche. Each year, it pumps out a new strategy game that builds on its past successes. But a publisher can't subsist on a title a year, and that's where *Atelier Iris* comes in. It wasn't made by NIS, but if I didn't tell you, you'd probably never know.

Rather than being a strategy game, though, *Atelier Iris* is a straight-up RPG. Despite its candy-colored 2D art, its gameplay will probably be more comfortable to fans of *Final Fantasy* than those of NIS' homegrown titles. But the characters and graphics make the biggest initial impression: The slightly too precious but extremely crisp anime artwork gives the game a bit of a kiddie feel despite its sheen.

Once you get into the groove of the gameplay, you'll discover there's more and more to like about *Atelier Iris*. The developers gradually ease you into its strategies, and what I soon learned is that a lot of thought and attention went into saving this game from being as archaic as it sometimes feels.

Take the battle system, for example. It's traditional turn-based stuff—nothing new. But as the game unfolds, new ideas are steadily introduced. The main character, Klein, is an alchemist—and he can create magical items midbattle. Toss in an unusually strategic turn system, positional damage, and the ability to pull warriors into and out of the fray at will, and it all adds up to full-featured gameplay in a deceptively simple-looking package. There's plenty of out-of-battle item creation, puzzle solving, and even platform jumping to be had, too.

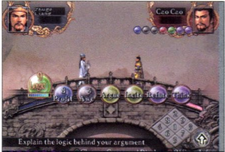
Of course, the game is still too traditionalist at heart, and that tempers my enthusiasm. Though the developers have layered gameplay systems with adorable charm, there's a slightly perfunctory feel about the whole exercise. It's a fun game, but an inessential one, best left to hardcore fans who've already defeated the genre's best. Still—somehow—underneath its bubbly veneer is polished RPG gameplay deeper than many recent, big-name attempts at the genre, and that's perhaps the most remarkable thing of all. « *Christian Nutt*

VERDICT While at times a throwback to the last generation of RPGs, it's surprisingly full-featured and charming; fans of the item crafting in *Star Ocean* will be in heaven.

Pub. NIS America **Dev.** Gust **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING ●●●●◐

While this is the first *Atelier* game to hit the United States, it's actually the sixth one released in Japan. *Atelier Marie*, the first title in the series, originally hit the Japanese PlayStation in May 1997.



ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS X

THE WAR OF (2D) ART

Almost once a year, a *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* game comes out, and when that happens, *OPM* pays some freelancer with too much time on his hands to review it.

As far as anyone knows, no one besides the die-hard fans that have kept the series afloat since the NES days is buying these titles. So every time, a different writer writes the same review: The game is very deep but technologically unimpressive and hard to understand. I find it hard to break this pattern, because these things are true.

It's now 2005, and graphics on the PS2 have reached an amazing level of artistry and technological excellence—beyond what we could have expected from the system when it first shipped. Meanwhile, *Romance* continues to use still images to portray the sweeping events of its historical drama and short snippets of text to tell its story.

But that doesn't really matter, because what reviewers have been saying for years is actually true. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* can float on its dedicated fan base because it's a captivating, complex game that follows the trials of a massive country at war. What it lacks in visceral thrills—you'll be navigating menus, not charging into battle—it makes up for in sheer scale.

And then I come to the part of the review that might just, for once, deviate from the obvious: This game is addictive. While it's essentially entirely based around manipulating menus and staring at statistics, the scope of the task at hand—uniting ancient China—adds a surprising amount of punch.

While it may not have the historical resonance for most Americans that it has for an Asian audience, it's surprisingly easy to get caught up in the sweep of things if you let it soak in. Fighting battles, debating policy, dueling, and expanding an empire with an endless series of menus does have its charms. It's an intellectual thrill that somehow eventually becomes real. But, to get back to your regularly scheduled review, it's not for everyone. Use caution, but approach it with an open mind. « *Christian Nutt*

This is, in fact, the fourth *ROTK* for the PS2, and there's a surprising amount of difference between them. This is how, as EA does with *Madden*, Koei keeps the fans coming back every year for more....

VERDICT A whirlwind of menus and tiny little men running on flat images that just works.

Pub. Koei **Dev.** Koei **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING ●●●●◐

INTEGRA TYPE R

JUICED

WE'VE SEEN IT ALL BEFORE, ABOUT FIVE TIMES ALREADY

***Juiced* is a feature-packed** racer with gorgeous graphics, lots of tuner-culture goodies, a great soundtrack, and a suitably stoic and serious sensibility, but what does it offer that we've not seen before? The answer, of course, is nothing, except perhaps the fact that it bizarrely lets you choose from one of six cell-phone types. It has all of the requisite and necessary events, online play, gambling, online gambling, teams, and a choice of cars that would fill up a good-sized lot, but we've seen all of this before. Maybe not all in the same place, but what *Underground* didn't do, *SRS* did, or *Midnight Club 3* just did rather nicely.

Like its contemporaries, *Juiced* has a gameplay style that falls quite heavily on the arcade end of the spectrum. It's not quite *Burnout* crazy, but it has an extremely forgiving handling model that means you can point a 200-hp front-wheel-drive car into a corner at 80 mph and actually make it around without a boatload of understeer. The cars feel suitably speedy, and while *Juiced* won't leave you dizzy like some recent racers do, the blurred textures make it look fast even when you're not moving.

Juiced's biggest problem, and this isn't really Juice Games' fault, is that it's a little late to this particular party. If it had been out a year or so ago, it would have rocked our worlds much harder. Alternatively, if it were priced $20 cheaper, it probably would have scored a full point higher. Try it for a weekend—it's a kick-ass rental game. « *John Davison*

JUICE Tons of features, gorgeous graphics
PULP You've seen it all before

Pub. THQ **Dev.** Juice Games **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING ●●●◐○

Silenced Pistol 60

LightSMG 28

DEAD TO RIGHTS II

COURTING CONTROVERSY FOR CASH

Dead to Rights II just wants to be liked. Well, actually, it doesn't give a f*** if you like it or not; it just wants to be purchased—several hundred thousand times over, preferably. In a quiet office just outside the food court of your local mall, a couple of marketers are perched atop their desks like vultures.

"C'mon kid, this game's got everything you love," says the one on the right. "Jack Slate—this Vin Diesel–type guy—he's dropping punks left and right, head shots and Uzis and all that crap. Check it out—he can rip the gun out of some hapless idiot's hand and execute him point-blank! And explosions! Ka-pow!"

You could give a s*** about Jack Slate, but you can't get a word in edgewise with these guys. They don't listen to people like you. In fact, they have no idea who you are, just that you're male and young and between age 18 and 26.

"This is the real deal, homie," says the one on the left. "Gritty city grown-up s***! Senate gonna ban us, son!" You wince at this, and he drops the act: "I'm not pulling it off, huh?" He slides you a customer-satisfaction survey and a pen:

1) I find the characters in this game to be: Lifeless mannequins spewing stupid one-liners.

2) The game's over-the-top gunfights are: Narcolepsy inducing, repetitive.

3) The hand-to-hand combat sections: Make *Double Dragon* look like *Soul Calibur*.

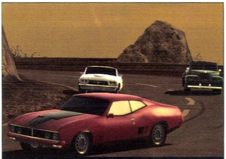
4) I would purchase this game if: I were a 12-year-old boy or the victim of a stealth lobotomy. « *Robert Ashley*

VERDICT A functional but boring game that attempts to cash in on the violent-game buzz.

Pub. Namco **Dev.** Namco **ESRB** M **MSRP** $49.99

RATING ●●○○○

Unlike the typical above-the-law rogue cop, Jack Slate roughs up local hoodlums with the help of his dog, Shadow, a feminizing touch that might bring a few teenage girls into the fold—yeah, right!



FORD RACING 3

FIX OR REPAIR DAILY?

Ford Racing 3 is one of the most full-featured budget racing titles you'll ever find. It contains no less than 55 different Ford vehicles, ranging from standard coupes to pickup trucks to the awesome Ford GT. The 26 tracks cover a range of different racing styles, and a handful of race modes includes everything from straightforward driving to following a racing line perfectly in order to earn boost.

So for your 15 bucks, there's definitely enough here to keep you entertained whether you're a dyed-in-the-wool Ford fanatic or you just want a racing game with a bit of substance for a nice, low price.

However, if you're looking for realistic physics or a major challenge, *Ford Racing 3* is likely to disappoint. Although the game offers competitions on both dirt and asphalt, both feel very similar, outside of the cars sliding around a bit more on dirt. And no matter which car you drive, they all have the same handling issues, especially under heavy braking. Going into a tight turn with any sort of speed generally leads to losing control of the car. Whether it's due to bad handling or the fact that hitting the brakes binds up the front end somehow isn't really important—the main thing is that it seems to happen a lot, and there's not much you can do about it. That said, *Ford Racing 3* is still very drivable once you get a handle on the quirks in the physics.

The car roster is impressive, even though most vehicles feel too similar out on the track. *Ford Racing 3*, more than the two previous titles, really seems to celebrate the carmaker's history in a big way. Just about every cool ride to come out of the Blue Oval's assembly line can be found here, from the 1923 Model T to the 2005 Mustang and everything in between.

If you're a Ford nut, you've got a nice little virtual showroom here, with a competent racing game to boot. I wouldn't throw out my copy of *GT4* or *Burnout 3* anytime soon, though. « *Greg Sewart*

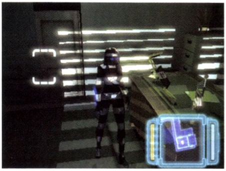
PROS An impressive roster of important Ford vehicles
CONS Floaty, quirky physics; most cars feel the same out on the track

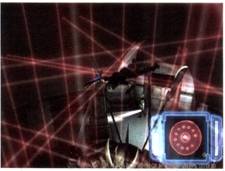
Pub. 2K Games **Dev.** Empire **ESRB** E **MSRP** $14.99

RATING ●●●○○

STOLEN

OR AT LEAST BORROWED LIBERALLY





HORROR SHOW

Stolen developer Blue 52 is currently working on a first-person shooter in the survival-horror vein called *Deadlight*. If its atmospheric work on *Stolen* is any guide, this will be one to watch.

You can learn just about everything you need to know about *Stolen* from the following two words: Samantha Fisher. The game takes so many cues from *Splinter Cell* that it could almost be a burglary-based side story. Now, that's not to say the games are on the same level of quality; *Stolen* has some pretty serious gameplay flaws that keep it from really going up against the stealth greats. But you'll find the same deliberate stealth pacing, similar graphical tricks with light and shadows, and even a few familiar moves in Samantha's—sorry, Anya's—arsenal.

In terms of level design and graphics, *Stolen* is surprisingly good—good enough to hold its own against much bigger, better-known games. The gameplay is nicely varied, too, interjecting sneaky creeping with action sequences and a bunch of minigame-style interludes such as cracking safes, hacking computers, and picking locks. It's relatively familiar fare for stealth fans but different enough to be worth a try—if you can look past *Stolen*'s unfortunately hefty selection of flaws.

One big problem arises from dealing with guards. First off, there's no way to permanently remove them; knock them out and they wake up in a few minutes, setting off an alarm that brings in even more unkillable guards. That hardly matters, though, because trying to sneak up behind a guard to knock him out is all but impossible: You need to be standing to grab him, and except on carpet, if you're walking upright, you're going to be heard. Fun, huh? There are also some pretty major issues with the camera, fairly sluggish controls that hurt Anya's acrobatic persona, and the incredibly frustrating fact that you can still be attacked—even killed—during the frequent unskippable cinemas. Oh, and for some utterly unknown reason, sometimes guards can see you in total darkness...and sometimes they can't.

Still, there's enough new here to make the game a moderately satisfying snack to tide fans over until the next *Splinter Cell*. « *Joe Rybicki*

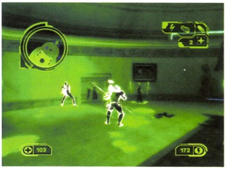
VERDICT It's no *Splinter Cell*, but it's similar enough to be familiar and different enough to be reasonably fresh.

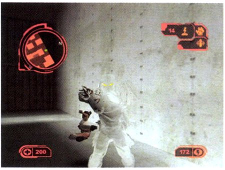
Pub. Hip Interactive **Dev.** Blue 52 **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

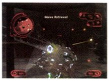
RATING [●●●○○]

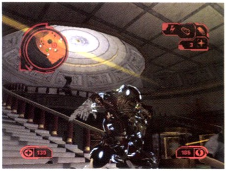
PREDATOR: CONCRETE JUNGLE

ONE UGLY MOTHER—YEAH, YOU KNOW THE QUOTE









Out of any game featuring the Predator, *Concrete Jungle* has the most bizarre and interesting story yet. Basically, you screwed up while hunting in 1930s America and are exiled. Fast-forward to 2030: You learn that humans have found and reverse-engineered your technology. So now you go hunting again, with the humans using the same tools you use. As one character comments, "It's as if the deer suddenly stood up and started shooting the hunters."

The overall game is pretty much a third-person Predator simulator, and both the gameplay and the story weave together elements seen in all the movies and comics that feature the Predator. Missions range from "hunt the cloaked gang members" to "tear the Mafia kingpin's head off." This is all good on paper, but once you play the game, things get annoying.

The camera has a tremendously hard time keeping track of you, and enemies who aren't onscreen have a pretty easy time remaining unseen when they hit you with projectile weapons. At times, the game requires you to be constantly scanning enemies (à la *Metroid Prime*), which isn't so bad—except when you need to scan someone while he's trying to shoot you. Finally, the AI is subpar, as enemies won't notice you killing their buddies or freak out upon discovering the bodies (which is kind of a hallmark of the franchise). Occasionally, all the annoying elements combine to create a sort of superaggravating mission, like a stealth mission that takes away your cloaking and is an instant failure if you're spotted.

It's too bad, because the ideas that drive the game are really good, and this could have easily become the best *Predator* game to date, except for all the mediocrity. Despite that, the fun of stealthily deboning a person and screaming that freaky Predator shriek is hard to deny. « *Thierry Nguyen*

ARNOLD Bizarre and interesting story, decent missions and enemies, excellent use of the license
DANNY GLOVER Bad camera, save system, and AI

Pub. VU Games **Dev.** Eurocom **ESRB** M **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●◐○○]

Position
02/02
Score 1921
0:42
0:12
1 AAA
2 cobrA
Cat-Nac
560

Lead
00:01.30
Position
04/04
Stunt Score 0
Lap
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Time
00:03.59
Best Lap
Total 00:03.59
1 GARCIA
2 ALLEN
3 RIVERA
4 cobrA

ATV OFFROAD FURY: BLAZIN' TRAILS

MISSION: CONTROL

Blazin' Trails is a perfect example of the hazards of doing a direct port of a PS2 game on PSP. Sure, it's packed with all the content of *Offroad Fury 3*—and then some. The problem is that *Offroad Fury* has always been a game of finesse: Control and timing are everything, especially with regard to "preloading" your jumps, a feat accomplished on PS2 with a quick back-and-forward motion of the analog stick. Without preloading, you completely lose the rhythm of jumps, finding yourself trundling up a hill while everyone else floats effortlessly over you.

And it's heartbreakingly difficult to do on PSP. The back-and-forward motion must be so quick that you're basically forced to use the analog nub. But, like many other early PSP games, *Blazin' Trails* fails to take into account the hypersensitivity of the nub. The result is that you can preload to your heart's content…but if you land just a little bit off, you're done for—you'll overcorrect for sure and go flying off the track.

The alternative is to use the D-pad, but if there's a reliable way to preload jumps with the D-pad, I haven't found it. So neither control scheme feels at all satisfactory, and of course you can't customize them. It would have been fine if Climax had made the game just a bit more forgiving, but the racing is still every bit as demanding as the game's PS2 predecessors.

That being said, though, the content of the game is pretty impressive. You're still able to careen through huge, wide-open environments, and they look great on PSP. An interesting card-collecting and trading system adds a social element, and the game even supports true online play in addition to ad hoc wireless.

Now, I've played a great deal of all the previous *Offroad Fury* games. It's possible that their control setup is just hardwired into my brain, so you may have an easier time getting used to *Blazin' Trails*' controls than I did. If so, you'll find plenty of game here to keep you busy. But you might want to try before you buy. « *Joe Rybicki*

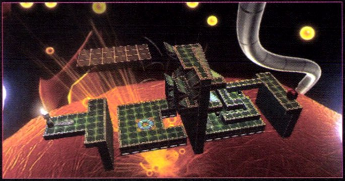
VERDICT A huge, solid game that's seriously crippled by an unworkable control scheme.

Pub. Sony CEA **Dev.** Climax **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING ●●●○○

TUNE IN

In a totally awesome move, *Blazin' Trails* allows you to add any music on your memory stick to the in-game jukebox. Let's make this a standard feature for all PSP games from now on, shall we?



ARCHER MACLEAN'S MERCURY

GREAT BALLS OF SILVER

Mercury's premise is a very simple one: Maneuver the blob of mercury through the requisite obstacles to a predetermined end point. The music and sound effects aren't incredibly compelling (especially when contrasted against the brilliance of *Lumines*' soundtrack), but the bright graphics are very shiny and pretty—watching the blob of mercury swirl, split, and wobble can be quite hypnotic.

There were times when I wanted to throw the PSP on the ground because I would get stuck so long on a puzzle, but that made the sensation of relief when I finally passed a level that much sweeter. For those who are more skilled than I am, there are high-score boards for each level. However, the boards weren't much of a motivator for me: I would often have what I thought was a stellar round but then would still find myself in last place without quite understanding why. This limits replayability somewhat, but if you are the type who has to have the best score, the game will provide you with a lot more playtime than it did for me.

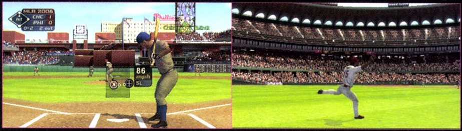
Overall, *Mercury* is less "puzzley" than I expected—the trick isn't figuring out the level so much as it's mastering the controls to complete it. The challenge of a game like *Lumines* lies in the player being able to calculate the best spot to drop blocks rather than being dexterous enough to get them there, but *Mercury* is much more about a physical dexterity than a mental one. And that's not bad, but it's something that traditional puzzle gamers (who often choose this type of game because they may be uncoordinated) should be aware of. « *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT A nice puzzle companion for those who are dexterous of hand rather than of mind.

Pub. Ignition Entertainment **Dev.** Awesome Studios **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING ●●●◐○

ARCHER MACLEAN made his name on snooker games in the U.K. He is an avid collector of classic arcade systems and pinball machines, and his house is a veritable museum of gaming with more than 100 arcade cabinets.



MLB
I LIVE FOR THIS?

In 1988, Gregg Jeffries was called up from the minor leagues to help the New York Mets clinch their division. In just 29 games, he hit six home runs, batted .321, drove in 17 runs, and totally dominated the conversations of me and my Mets fans buddies. We thought we were witnessing the birth of a god. The following season we really got to know Gregg Jeffries. He continued to dominate our conversations, but this time it was because we so hated that crybaby flash in the pan that we wanted to wrap him in blankets filled with our boogers. Familiarity indeed breeds contempt.

So it is with *MLB*. At first I was blown away by the fantastic graphics, the stellar play-by-play commentary, and the opportunity to play an entire season while commuting. But then I got to know *MLB* and my enthusiasm deflated. Why? Well, mostly because I felt robbed 70 percent of the time I played it—the CPU would turn dazzling double plays, but regardless of how frantically I punched buttons, my fielders took forever to throw the ball. Couple that with certain doubles turning into not-even-close heartbreaking outs at second thanks to the CPU's ridiculous ability to fire lasers from the outfield, and I would have thrown the controller in frustration had the controller not cost $250.

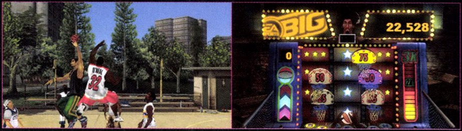
I'll probably keep playing *MLB* in much the same way I felt obliged to halfheartedly root for Gregg Jeffries. What choice do I have? But when something else comes along, I'm trading this sucker a whole lot faster than the asstard Mets management did Jeffries. « *Robert Coffey*

PROS Great graphics, great commentary
CONS Unreliable controls, frustrating gameplay

Pub. Sony CEA **Dev.** 989 Sports **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●◐○]

In his 14 major league seasons, Gregg Jeffries averaged (per 162 games) 14 home runs and 73 RBIs, compiled a lifetime batting average of .289, and alienated most of his teammates. Not so awesome after all. However, he did manage to average only 38 strikeouts per 162 games, for which he deserves some begrudging respect. But he still sucks.



NBA STREET SHOWDOWN
BROKEN HOOP DREAMS

Much like its NFL counterpart, *NBA Street* seems like a natural fit for the PSP. The fast-paced action is enough to tide any basketball fan over for short bursts when on the go. While EA has done a great job of bringing most of what makes the console series great to the PSP, it failed to do one very important thing—bring the slick controls of the console versions as well.

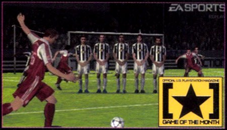
This issue doesn't destroy the entire experience, but it does force you to adapt and adjust your timing. The shooting mechanics are the biggest culprit in this mess. You can try to shoot the ball by holding down the button and releasing it at the top of the arc, but you'll immediately notice that the ball usually doesn't release when you release the button, which naturally results in more blocked shots. There *is* a slight fix that involves holding the Shoot button and then tapping it to release the ball a little faster, but it seems like this sacrifices a lot of accuracy, so don't expect to hit a lot of outside shots with a brand-new team. There are also some problems with general movement. It shouldn't be difficult to line up a simple three-point jumper, but your player often slides a few feet, gliding over the three-point line and shooting a two.

However, the foundation of what makes the series so fun is still here. Games are still fun and quite challenging, even if that challenge is inflated by the poor controls. You can still pull off plenty of ridiculous street-style jukes. Plus, the minigames are fun (particularly the shootout), and the multiplayer matches are a blast, especially if both people are still getting used to the controls. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

FAKE THE FUNK If you can get over the learning curve for the controls, you'll have fun bringing it to the streets.

Pub. EA Sports Big **Dev.** EA Sports Big **ESRB** E **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●○○]



FIFA SOCCER
FOOTY FUN

Seeing ***FIFA Soccer*** on PSP for the first time reaffirms one thing—this little system sure is a powerful device. If you didn't know any better, you might even mistake this portable version of *FIFA* for one of its console counterparts. While there are a few little hiccups here and there, it really looks that good, plus it plays just as well for the most part.

In fact, a single control quirk is the only thing that really detracts from the game. It's not that it's hard to maneuver players around the field or make precise passes and accurate shots on goal (because it's not), it's the layout. The freestyle control is mapped to the D-pad, so you have to take your thumb off the analog nub to use it, which can be tricky when you're sprinting down the field with only one or two defenders in your sights.

It's also worth pointing out that it's still pretty easy to abuse the cross-and-header combination to score a quick goal. Any time one of your players breaks away from a defender and makes it to the corner, a quick cross to a player standing near the goal often results in a score. Otherwise, the gameplay is good ol' *FIFA* fun. The game does an excellent job of mimicking the pace and flow of the actual sport, and it also does a good job with the sounds, which include the standard assortment of crowd chants and decent play-by-play.

As far as modes go, there aren't a lot of them, but there're still plenty to keep you busy. The season and tournament modes are pretty standard, as are the multiplayer options. The challenges mode is good if you just want to jump right in and play for a few minutes to earn some extra points to unlock additional kits, stadiums, and balls in the FIFA store. The create-a-player mode is surprisingly deep and offers you a wealth of options to create a unique player with—but you can't really appreciate the detail unless your player happens to be in a replay. At any rate, this is the best soccer game on the PSP at the moment, and any soccer fan would do well to pick it up. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

THE HANG OF IT
Maybe it's a testament to *FIFA*'s design or just poor implementation, but the freestyle control isn't entirely necessary for you to be competitive in *FIFA*. Sure, it comes in handy in a lot of situations, but some smart passing can be just as effective.

PROS Great FIFA gameplay, detailed stadiums and players, challenges mode is fun
CONS Awkward control scheme, shallow modes

Pub. EA Sports **Dev.** EA Sports **ESRB** E **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●●○]

BE COOL

(John Travolta, Uma Thurman)

AND NOT BY STAYING IN SCHOOL

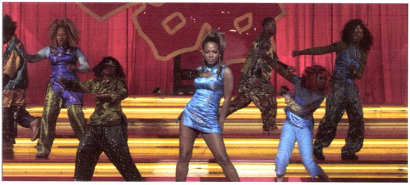
by John Scalzi

***Be Cool* can't.** And that's a shame, because there's so much here that is, in itself, automatically cool. John Travolta as Chili Palmer? Come on. Travolta invented cool, and Chili's got cool to burn. Uma Thurman? The Bride rocks. The Elmore Leonard novel upon which the film is based, in which Chili tries his hand at the music business? Cool like an ice cube. Hell, even The Rock (who plays a gay Samoan rapper) has a fair level of personal cool, or at least as much as a man who has a definite article for a first name can have. There's very little about the component parts of this film that doesn't bespeak a cool that no normal human could hope to achieve.

And yet pour it all together and it doesn't work. Cool isn't the sum of its parts, it's the whole thing, all at once. And what's missing here is a unifying element. In the film's prequel, *Get Shorty*, that unifying element was director Barry Sonnenfeld, who is emphatically not cool himself but knew what it was and how to get it to show up in his camera. This time the director is F. Gary Gray, whose films (*The Italian Job*, *The Negotiator*) are competent but not films you'd identify as exemplars of cool style. Gray is the weak link—him and the ridiculous Vince Vaughn (whose character, a wannabe playa, is, to be fair, supposed to be trying too hard).

It says something about the film that even a spicy dance between Travolta and Thurman doesn't catch fire. We know what these two can do on the dance floor, and to see them not do it makes you look for someone to blame. In this case, Gray's got the bag. It's possible to watch *Be Cool* and still be passably entertained—Gray is competent—but you won't come away with the feeling that you've spent time on something special. Given all that this movie has to work with, that's not cool.

RATING ●●◐○○



BEYOND THE SEA

(Kevin Spacey, Kate Bosworth)

When you become a big star, what ill-advised vanity project will you gamble your audience goodwill on? If you gamble well, you could make *Braveheart*. If you gamble poorly, you could make *Battlefield Earth*. If you're Kevin Spacey, you land somewhere in the middle with *Beyond the Sea*, a serviceable biopic of long-dead singer Bobby Darin, which neither enlightens nor offends. Darin fans may note you're a decade older than Darin was when he kicked, but how many of them are still alive?

RATING ●●●○○

HITCH

(Will Smith, Eva Mendes)

Did you know this is the first romantic comedy that Will Smith has starred in? This is vaguely surprising, because he seems made for the romantic comedy genre: He's got a genial and pleasing screen presence that doesn't work too hard, women like him, and men aren't threatened by him. Entirely unsurprisingly, *Hitch* works like a charm: Smith is a smooth operator who helps floppy schmoes meet really hot girls and then naturally has to deal with the fact he's becoming twitterpated by a girl as well (Eva Mendes, so it's an entirely understandable twitterpation), and all of a sudden his inner floppy schmo goes on display. Yeah, you know how it goes, and you know what's going to happen. But you know what? You won't care, because this film automatically gets you to second base with a clear path to third.

RATING ●●●◐○

CURSED

(Christina Ricci, Joshua Jackson)

The team from *Scream* gets it on with werewolves! What could possibly go wrong? Quite a lot, it seems, since this film is a big fat incoherent mess that not even the presence of Christina Ricci, everyone's favorite gothlet, can rescue. Director Wes Craven and writer Kevin Williamson try but fail to put a new edge on the werewolves. This means *An American Werewolf in London*, 25 years old now, is still the most recent good werewolf film. And that's just sad.

RATING ◐○○○○

THE JACKET

(Adrien Brody, Keira Knightley)

Since winning an Oscar, Adrien Brody has played a village idiot and a guy stuffed in a morgue drawer. Note to Adrien: Fire your agent. *The Jacket* tries to be stylish horror—the film skips back and forth in time-travel fashion to suggest how Brody has found himself tied up in an insane asylum, but it's a little too marinated in its need to be stylish and spooky to actually be either of those things. On the plus side: Keira Knightley's here! Hello, Keira. Maybe you should talk to your agent, too.

RATING ●●○○○

DVD RELEASES

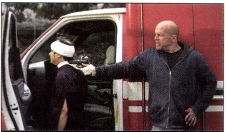
June 7
Be Cool
Beyond the Sea
Seed of Chucky
The Sopranos: **Season 5**
June 14
Hitch
June 21
Cursed
Hostage
The Jacket
Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous
Oz: Season 5
June 28
Diary of a Mad Black Woman
The Pacifier

THE PACIFIER

(Vin Diesel, Carol Kane)

Just because he looks as well-marbled as a side of beef, people think Vin Diesel is actually stupid, but *The Pacifier* is fine proof our friend Vin's got a brain: He knew that per the Schwarzenegger model of career maintenance, he should follow an excessively violent and nonsensical action flick with something family friendly that shows, shucks, he knows he's just lucky to make movies at all, and not above making fun of himself by, say, being assaulted by a duck. Lucky for him, it worked.

RATING ●●●○○

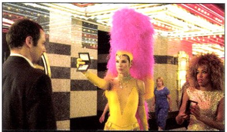


HOSTAGE

(Bruce Willis, Kevin Pollak)

Watching this film reminded me that it has been a while since Bruce Willis played a character who didn't seem like what he really needed was a good dose of a bran laxative. Here he plays a hostage negotiator with a hidden agenda—he appears to be trying to get one family released when there's a whole other family he's really trying to get released. Very twisty, and pretty good, too, in terms of story and style. But Bruce: Dude. Try to be happy, man. We liked it when you smiled.

RATING ●●●◐○



MISS CONGENIALITY 2: ARMED AND FABULOUS

(Sandra Bullock, Regina King)

If the film *Speed 2* taught us anything, it's that either Sandra Bullock should stay well away from any film with a "2" in the title, or we should when she's involved. Sandy didn't stay away from *Miss Congeniality 2*, and as a result we've got a chunky, unfunny, and unnecessary excursion into the further adventures of FBI agent Gracie Hart, only this time in Las Vegas because it gives her an excuse to wear kooky costumes. Sandra couldn't stay away, but guess what I think you should do.

RATING ●◐○○○

UMD RELEASES

June 7
National Lampoon's Van Wilder
Open Water
The Punisher
Saw
Terminator 2: Judgment Day
June 14
Hitch
June 21
Cursed
Hostage
King Arthur
Tron

SEED OF CHUCKY

(Jennifer Tilly, Redman)

Chucky and Tiffany are back, resurrected by their son! If that last sentence did not drive you clinically insane the moment the information from your optic nerve was processed by your brain, you might be able to eke some fun out of this wretched film. But I think it would be better to go mad first. The only good thing to be said is that everyone involved knows they're unloading a steamy pile of crap on the screen, so they enjoy the process and you don't have to feel too embarrassed for them.

RATING ●◐○○○

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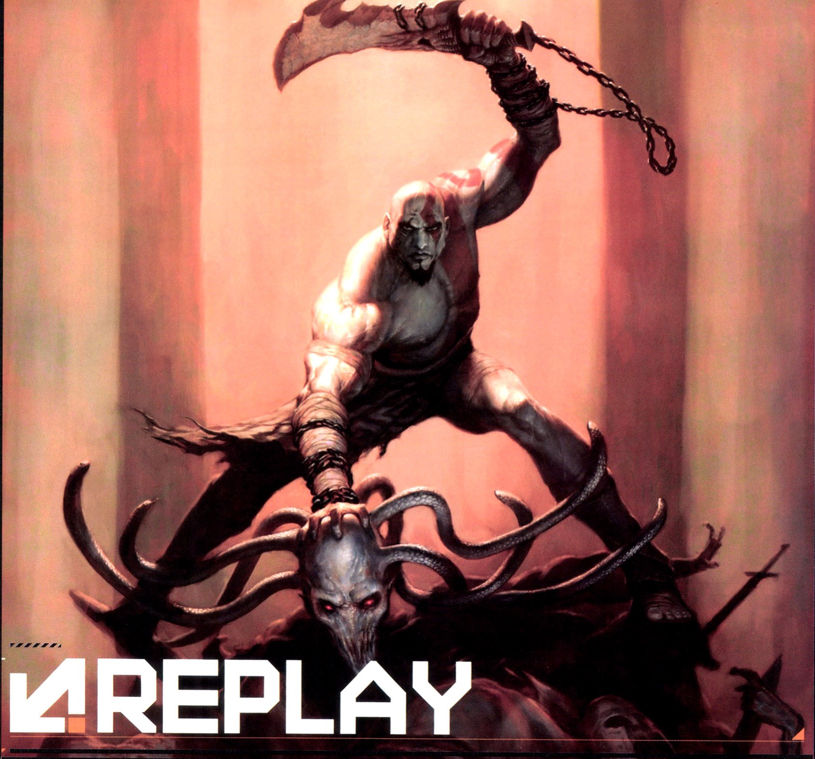

REPLAY

84>

GOD OF WAR

IT TAKES A LOT OF WORK TO LOOK THIS GOOD

PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIMA
Prima Games, leading publisher of gaming guides, provides *OPM* with top-of-the-line strategies every month.

In this issue, we did something a little different. Prima let us mine their awesome *God of War* guide for behind-the scenes art and info. Thanks, guys!

INSIDE

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The precursor to *Spyro* and *Ratchet & Clank.*

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The perfect games for those days when you just don't want to be you.

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Which baseball game is really best?

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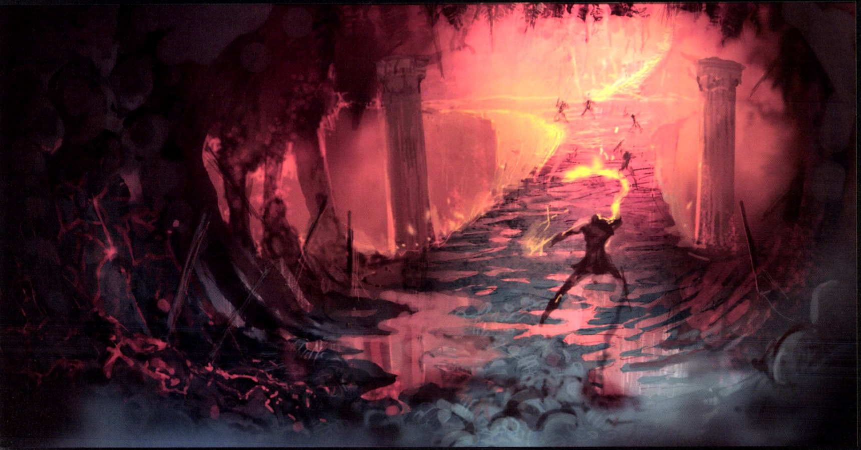
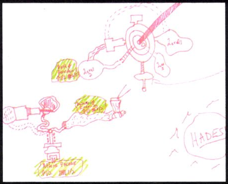
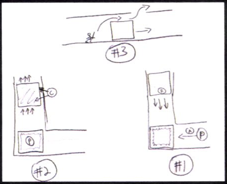
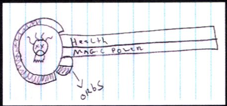


GOD OF WAR

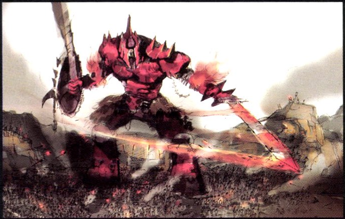
YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY





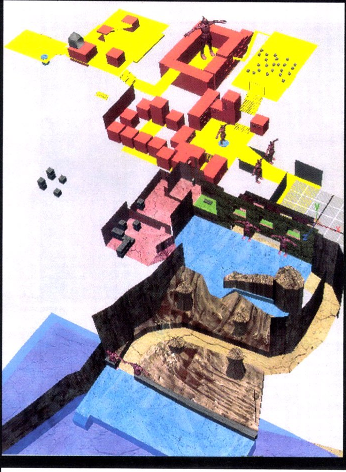


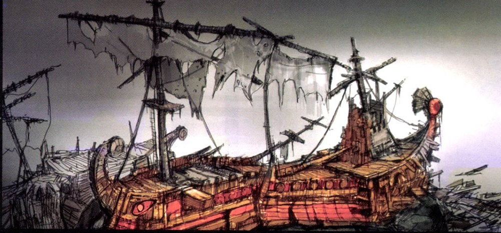
It takes a village to raise a child, and it takes a whole team of artists to create the world of a game like *God of War*. David Jaffe, the game's director, had everything envisioned in his head, but his artistic skills were preventing him from showing everyone else, as you can see from the sketches above and to the right. Fortunately, there were a lot of other team members more gifted in artistry who could help him translate his vision into reality. Thanks to Prima, we had the chance to hear from three of the game's artists and bring you some of the early concept art for *God of War*.

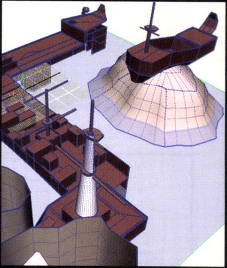


CHARLIE WEN, CONCEPT ARTIST

I was told that Ares would be maybe 90 percent elemental and 5 or 10 percent human, so that's what I was going for [early on]. He's just pure power, almost like he's this unstoppable force. And though Dave liked it, he just wasn't sure how we would do it. It probably was a slow transition toward being more human. He was still a huge guy, but he has all of this armor on that allows him to do all these things.

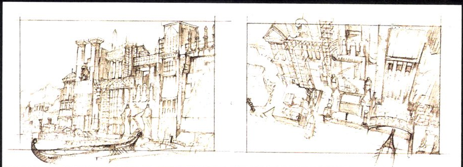


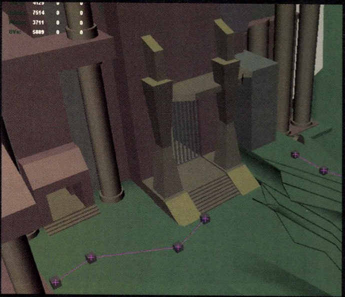


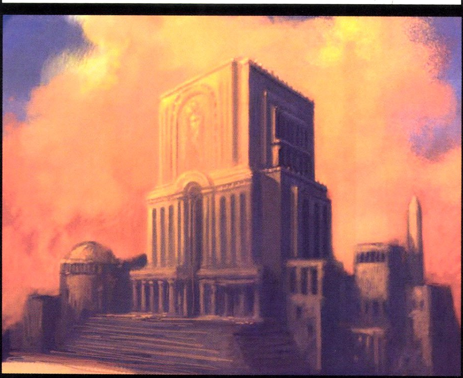


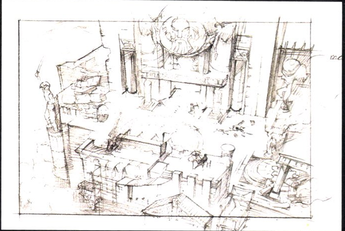
DAVE JAFFE, GAME DIRECTOR

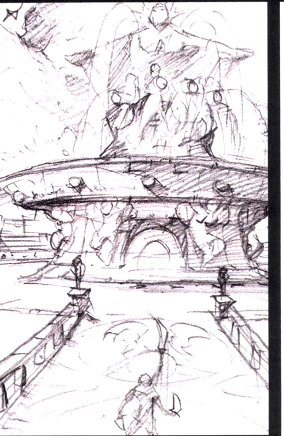
The goal with the *God of War* world was to create a place that felt like a giant theme-park ride or a set in one of those great high-adventure movies...places that you'd really want to explore and spend time in, and feel like you're having this grand adventure. And I think these guys, week after week, continuously were able to come up with set pieces and ideas...that they just topped themselves constantly. They've really given us this great world to play in. They did an amazing job, and I am so grateful as a gamer that I get to actually play in this space. I ended up getting what I wanted, which was this high-adventure amazing fantasy setting, which was inspired by the stuff I grew up with, the movies I grew up watching.

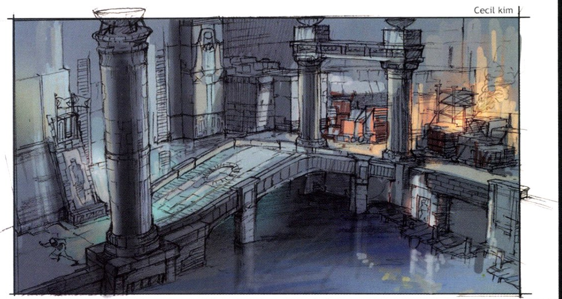




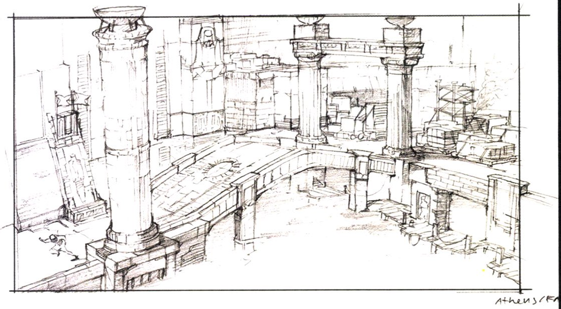






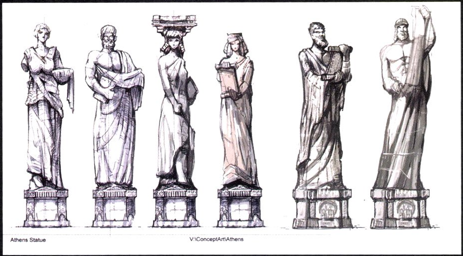

Cecil kim
Athens/F

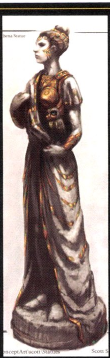
Athens / Dock Area Facade 1



CHARLIE WEN, CONCEPT ARTIST
The Greek theme was one of the big elements we were dealing with. We would often hear "It's not Greek enough." We're like, "What does that mean?" We'd sometimes take it right from Greek sources! But what we started seeing was, "OK, it's not Greek enough, according to what the general public knows." And, that's what we had to go toward.

TERRY SMITH, ART DIRECTOR
We were trying to walk that fine line between a fantasy game environment and a traditional Greek environment. So part of it was getting stuff that made it feel Greek.


Athens Statue
V:\ConceptArt\Athens


hena Statue
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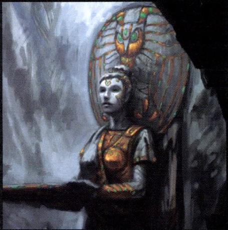
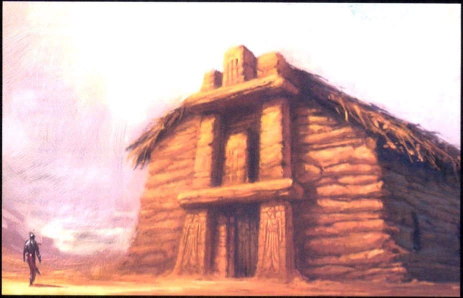
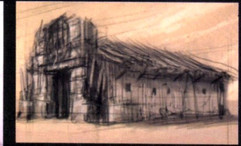
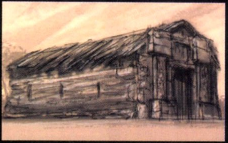
Scott S

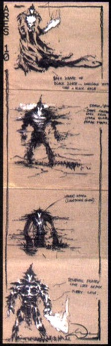


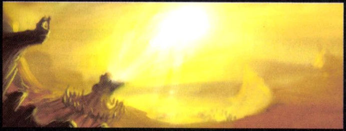
TERRY SMITH, ART DIRECTOR
One of the interesting aspects—especially in the Pandora section—was a lot of the times you'll see multiple iterations of statues. One reason was that an idea of David's was that he wanted those statues to come to life, whether it was Atlas or Poseidon rising out of the water.

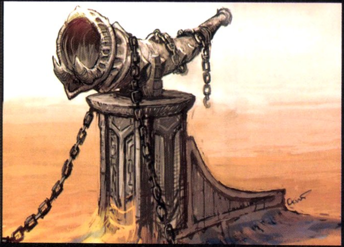


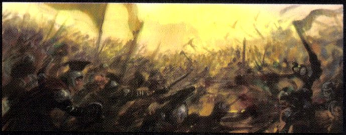


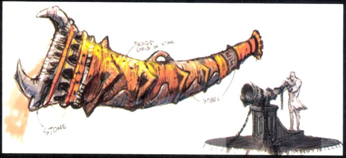


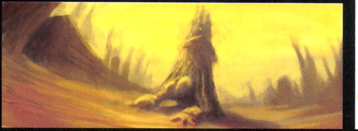


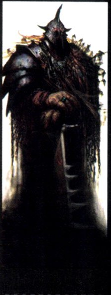










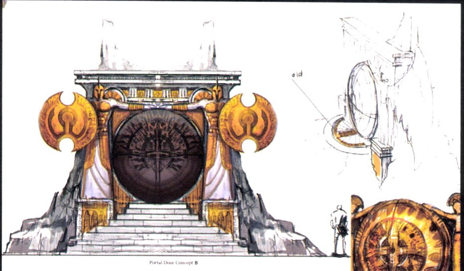


CECIL KIM, CONCEPT ARTIST

When we first started concepting out environments, it wasn't defined as levels. We picked out the important locations, such as Pandora, Athens, and Hades. All I knew is that the game should feel really big, which means that there is no cramped area. It's more like a giant challenge against the gods and huge monsters. The look of the environment should be utterly gigantic.

TERRY SMITH, ART DIRECTOR

The features that were in the environments…the objects, the architecture, those types of features…reflected on what was going on with David's story. For example, in Pandora, that whole sequence is about an architect who, in David's mind, has basically gone mad. The idea was that the structures, traps, and visuals reflect a madman in some instances.



Portal Door Concept B

PLAY IT—NOW!

To see the end result for yourself, simply pop the demo disc from this magazine into your PS2. There, you'll have a chance to check out *God of War's* first level, which centers around a battle against the Hydra.

TRICKS AND REVIEW ARCHIVE

Game names in black bars indicate a Greatest Hits title. Names in orange indicate a score of 5 out of 5. ⚡ indicates the game supports online play.

PSP

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Ape Escape: On the Loose	Sony CEA	●●●	93
Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower	Capcom	●●●	93
Dynasty Warriors	Koei	●●●	92
Gretzky NHL	Sony CEA	●●●◖	93

Go to Gretzky Challenge, Unlockable and press Start.

UNLOCKS EVERYTHING	SHOENLOC

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Lumines	Ubisoft	●●●●	92
Metal Gear Acid	Konami	●●●●	92

Enter these in the Password section.

GIVES CARD NO. 173	Viper Viper
GIVES CARD NO. 178	Mika Slayton Mika
GIVES CARD NO. 182	Karen Houjou Karen
GIVES CARD NO. 184	Jehuty Jehuty
GIVES CARD NO. 199	XM8 Xmeight

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
NBA	Sony CEA	●●◖	93
Need for Speed Underground Rivals	EA Games	●●●◖	92
NFL Street 2: Unleashed	EA Sports Big	●●●	93
Rengoku: The Tower of Purgatory	Konami	●	93
Ridge Racer	Namco	●●●●	92
Smart Bomb	Eidos	●◖	93
Spider-Man 2	Activision	●●●◖	93
Tiger Woods PGA Tour	EA Sports	●●●●	93
Tony Hawk's Underground 2: Remix	Activision	●●●●	93

Go to Options, Cheat Codes and enter the following:

PERFECT RAIL BALANCE	tightrope
UNLOCK *THPS* TONY HAWK	birdman

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Twisted Metal: Head-On	Sony CEA	●●●●	93
Untold Legends: Brotherhood...	Sony Online Ent.	●●●	92
Wipeout Pure	Sony CEA	●●●●	93
World Tour Soccer	Sony CEA	●●●	93

PS2

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
.hack//INFECTION	Bandai	●●●◖	65
.hack//MUTATION	Bandai	●●●●	69
.hack//OUTBREAK	Bandai	●●●●	73
.hack//QUARANTINE	Bandai	●●●●	76
18 Wheeler American Pro Trucker	Acclaim	●●●●	52
4x4 EVO	GOD Games	●●●●	44
2002 FIFA World Cup	EA Sports	●●●●	58
Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies	**Namco**	●●●●◖	**51**
Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	Namco	●●●●	87
Activision Anthology	Activision	●●●●	64
Aero Elite: Combat Academy	Sega	●●●	67
The Adventures of Cookie & Cream	Agetec	●●●◖	44
Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	●●●●◖	59
Airblade	Namco	●●●●	53
Airforce Delta Strike	Konami	●●●	78
Alias	Acclaim	●●◖	81
Alien Hominid	0-3 Entertainment	●●●●	88
Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	EA Games	●●●◖	72
All-Star Baseball 2002	Acclaim	●●●◖	44
All-Star Baseball 2003	Acclaim	●●●◖	56
All-Star Baseball 2004	Acclaim	●●●	67
⚡All-Star Baseball 2005	Acclaim	●●◖	80
Alter Echo	THQ	●●	73
American Idol	Codemasters	●	77
⚡Amplitude	Sony CEA	●●●●	68
Antz Extreme Racing	Empire	●◖	61
Ape Escape 2	Ubisoft	●●●●◖	70
Ape Escape: Primed & Pumped	Ubisoft	●●◖	88
Aqua Aqua	3DO	●●	42
Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits	Sony CEA	●●●●	70

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Arctic Thunder	Midway	●	50
⚡Area 51	Midway	●●●●	90
Armored Core 2	Agetec	●●●	39
Armored Core 2: Another Age	Agetec	●●●◖	48
Armored Core 3	Agetec	●●●◖	61
Armored Core: Nexus	Agetec	●●	85
Army Men: Air Attack	3DO	●●●◖	44
Army Men: Green Rogue	3DO	●●	45
Army Men RTS	3DO	●●●●	56
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2	3DO	●●◖	45
Asterix & Obelix Kick Buttix	Atari	●●◖	85
Astro Boy	Sega	●●●	85
Atari Anthology	Atari	●●	89
Athens 2004	Sony CEA	●●◖	83
ATV Offroad Fury	**Sony CEA**	●●●●	**42**
⚡**ATV Offroad Fury 2**	**Sony CEA**	●●●●	**64**
⚡ATV Offroad Fury 3	Sony CEA	●●●●	88
ATV Quad Power Racing 2	Acclaim	●●●●	66
⚡Auto Modellista	Capcom	●●◖	69
Backyard Baseball	Atari	●●◖	81
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	Eidos	●●◖	75
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes the Neighborhood	Eidos	●◖	89
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	**Interplay**	●●●●◖	**52**
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Interplay	●●●◖	77
Barbarian	Titus	●●	57
The Bard's Tale	Vivendi Universal	●●●●◖	86
Bass Strike Virtual Fishing Tournament	THQ	●◖	51
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	Ubisoft	●●	74
Batman: Vengeance	Ubisoft	●●●	51
Battle Assault 3	Bandai	●●◖	88
Battle Engine Aquila	Atari	●●●◖	65
Battlestar Galactica	Vivendi Universal	●●●	76
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	●●●●	75
Big Mutha Truckers	Empire	●●●	71
Bionicle: The Game	EA Games	●●◖	75
Black & Bruised	Majesco	●●●●	67
Blade II	Activision	●●	62
Blood Omen 2	Eidos	●●●◖	57
BloodRayne	Majesco	●●●◖	63
BloodRayne 2	Majesco	●●●●◖	87
Blood Will Tell	Sega	●●●●	87
Bloody Roar 3	Activision	●●●◖	47
Bloody Roar 4	Konami	●	75
Blowout	Majesco	●●●	77
BMX XXX	Acclaim	●◖	65
Bombastic	Capcom	●●◖	72
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	●●●●	67
Britney's Dance Beat	THQ	●●●●	58
⚡Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	Ubisoft	●●●	92

Create a profile using this name.

ALL LEVELS	BAKERSDOZEN

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
The Bouncer	Square EA	●●●	42
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Sierra/Fox	●●●◖	73
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	Bam	●●●●	82
Burnout	Acclaim	●●●●◖	52
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	●●●●	63
⚡**Burnout 3: Takedown**	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**85**
Butt-Ugly Martians: Zoom or Doom!	Crave	●●	73
Cabela's Big Game Hunter	**Activision**	●●◖	**67**
Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2005 Adv.	Activision	●●●	90
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts	**Activision**	●●◖	**76**
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004 Season	Activision	●●◖	74
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005 Season	Activision	●●●●◖	85
⚡Call of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	●●●●	89

Need a little help in your campaign? Use this code to unlock all the levels at the start of the game. You are now free to skip to any level you'd like.

ALL LEVELS At the Level Select screen, hold Up on controller two, then press Start, Select, Select, Square on controller one.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Capcom Fighting Evolution	Capcom	●◖	88
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	●●●●◖	51
Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums	Bam	●●◖	77
CART Fury	Midway	●	47
Casper: Spirit Dimensions	TDK Mediactive	●●◖	50

MONSTER TALENT

We weren't the only ones who thought the development team behind *Beyond Good & Evil* really knew its stuff—Peter Jackson likes its work so much that he hand-picked the studio to make the licensed game for his upcoming film, *King Kong*.

DOGGONE IT

Although collective cat ownership on *OPM* outnumbers dog ownership 9 to 4, virtual canines beat virtual felines hands down. We took an office poll: If forced to choose between playing *A Cat in the Hat* or *A Dog's Life*, every member of *OPM* would go to the dogs.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami	●●●●	74
The Cat in the Hat	Vivendi Universal	●●	76
Catwoman	EA Games	●	84
⚡Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest	Sony Online	●●●●◖	78
⚡Champions: Return to Arms	Sony Online	●●●●◖	90
Chaos Legion	Capcom	●●●◖	70
⚡Chessmaster	Ubisoft	●●●◖	70
Choplifter: Crisis Shield	Xicat	●●●	69
ChoroQ	Atlus	●●●◖	86
City Crisis	Take-Two	●●●	48
Clock Tower 3	Capcom	●●●	68
Cold Fear	Ubisoft	●●●	92
Cold Winter	Vivendi Universal	●●●◖	93
Colin McRae Rally 3	**Codemasters**	●●●●●	**68**
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Acclaim	●●●	83
Commandos 2: Men of Courage	Eidos	●●	62
Conflict: Desert Storm	**Gotham Games**	●◖	**63**
Conflict: Desert Storm II	Gotham Games	●●●	74
Conflict: Vietnam	Global Star	●●◖	86
Conflict Zone	Ubisoft	●●◖	63
Constantine	THQ	●●●	92
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	●●●●◖	64
Corvette	Global Star	●●●◖	81
Cool Boarders 2001	Sony CEA	●●●●	46
Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex	**Universal**	●●●◖	**51**
⚡Crash 'N' Burn	Eidos	●●	87
Crash Nitro Kart	**Vivendi Universal**	●●●◖	**76**
Crash Twinsanity	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	86
Crazy Taxi	**Acclaim**	●●●●	**46**
Crimson Sea 2	Koei	●●●◖	80
Crimson Tears	Capcom	●●●◖	83
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubisoft	●●	74
Culdcept	SNK	●●●◖	75
Dark Angel: Vampire Apocalypse	Metro3D	●◖	49
Dark Cloud	**Sony CEA**	●●●●◖	**46**
Dark Cloud 2	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**66**
Dark Summit	THQ	●●●◖	52
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	**Acclaim**	●●●◖	**50**
DDR Extreme	Konami	●●●●	85
DDRMAX	Konami	●●●●	63
DDRMAX 2	Konami	●●●●	74
Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore	Tecmo	●●●●◖	39
Dead to Rights	**Namco**	●●●	**65**
Death by Degrees	Namco	●◖	90
Def Jam Vendetta	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●	**67**
Def Jam Fight for NY	EA Games	●●●●◖	85

Want to play as your favorite rapper but don't have the heart to fight them in story mode in order to unlock them? Use the following codes to score yourself some reward points to unlock your favorites without violating your fan club membership.To use this code, enter the password in the Cheat menu:

NEWJACK	100 reward points
THESOURCE	100 reward points
CROOKLYN	100 reward points

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Defender	Midway	●●●◖	62
⚡Destruction Derby Arenas	Gathering	●●◖	80
Deus Ex: The Conspiracy	Eidos	●●●●◖	56
Devil May Cry	**Capcom**	●●●●●	**50**
Devil May Cry 2	**Capcom**	●●●	**66**
Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening	Capcom	●●●●◖	91
Digimon Rumble Arena 2	Bandai	●●●	88
Digital Hitz Factory	XS Games	●●●●	76
Dino Stalker	Capcom	●●●◖	61
Disaster Report	Agetec	●●●◖	65
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atlus	●●●●	72
Disney Golf	EA Games	●●●●	61
Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure	Activision	●●●●	73
Disney's PK: Out of the Shadows	Ubisoft	●●◖	63
Disney's Treasure Planet	Sony CEA	●●●◖	64
A Dog's Life	Hip Interactive	●●	84
Donald Duck: Goin' Quackers	Ubisoft	●●●◖	42
Downforce	Titus	●●	57
Downhill Domination	Sony CEA	●●●●	71
Dr. Muto	Midway	●●◖	63
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	**Atari**	●●●◖	**65**

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	**Atari**	●●◖	**76**
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3	Atari	●●●●	88
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	Atari	●●◖	93
Dragon Rage	3DO	●◖	54
Drakan: The Ancients' Gates	Sony CEA	●●●●	53
Drakengard	Square Enix USA	●●	78
DRIV3R	Atari	●●●◖	83
Driven	Bam	●	52
Driving Emotion Type-S	Square EA	●●◖	41
Drome Racers	EA Games	●●◖	64
Dropship	Bam	●●●●	57
Dual Hearts	Atlus	●●●	61
Duel Masters	Atari	●●●	89
The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	Ubisoft	●●●◖	87
Dynasty Tactics	Koei	●●●●◖	61
Dynasty Tactics 2	Koei	●●●●	74
Dynasty Warriors 2	Koei	●●●●	38
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	●●●●	52
Dynasty Warriors 3: Xtreme Legends	Koei	●●●◖	65
Dynasty Warriors 4	Koei	●●●●◖	68
Dynasty Warriors 4: Xtreme Legends	Koei	●●●◖	75
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	**Koei**	●●●●	**85**
Dynasty Warriors 5	Koei	●●●◖	92
Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future	Acclaim	●●◖	56
Echo Night: Beyond	Agetec	●●●	84
Egg Mania: Eggstreme Madness	Kemco	●●◖	61
⚡eJay Clubworld	Crave	●●	73
Endgame	Empire	●●	59
Enter the Matrix	**Atari**	●●●	**71**
Enthusia Professional Racing	Konami	●●◖	93
Ephemeral Fantasia	Konami	●◖	49
Escape From Monkey Island	**LucasArts**	●●●●●	**46**
⚡ESPN College Hoops	ESPN Videogames	●●●◖	76
⚡ESPN College Hoops 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●◖	88
ESPN International Track & Field	Konami	●●●	39
ESPN International Winter Sports 2002	Konami	●●●●	54
⚡ESPN Major League Baseball	ESPN Videogames	●●●◖	80
ESPN MLS Extra Time	Konami	●●	44
ESPN National Hockey Night	Konami	●◖	45
ESPN NBA 2Night	Konami	●●	42
ESPN NBA 2Night 2002	Konami	●●●	56
⚡ESPN NBA 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●●	87
⚡**ESPN NBA Basketball**	**ESPN Videogames**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡ESPN NFL Football	ESPN Videogames	●●●●◖	72
⚡ESPN NFL 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●●	84
⚡ESPN NHL Hockey	ESPN Videogames	●●●●◖	73
⚡ESPN NHL 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●●◖	85
ESPN Winter X Games Snowboarding	Konami	●●●	41
ESPN Winter X Games Snowboarding 2002	Konami	●●●	53
ESPN X Games Skateboarding	Konami	●●●●	49
Eternal Ring	Agetec	●●	38
Eve of Extinction	Eidos	●●◖	56
Everblue 2	Capcom	●●●	66
Evergrace	Agetec	●●	39
⚡EverQuest Online Adventures	Sony Online	●●◖	66
⚡EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers	Sony Online	●●●◖	77
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	THQ	●●●	70
Evil Twin	Ubisoft	●●	52
Evolution Skateboarding	Konami	●●◖	63
Evolution Snowboarding	Konami	●	65
Extermination	Sony CEA	●●◖	48
Extreme-G III	Acclaim	●●●●	50
EyeToy: AntiGrav	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	87
EyeToy: Groove	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	80
F1 2001	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**52**
F1 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	60
F1 Career Challenge	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**71**
F1 Championship	Ubisoft	●●●●	43
F1 Championship Season 2000	EA Sports	●●◖	41
Fairly OddParents: Shadow Showdown	THQ	●●●◖	88
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	Interplay	●●◖	78
Fantavision	Sony CEA	●●●●	40
Fatal Frame	Tecmo	●●●●	55
Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly	Tecmo	●●●●	77
Ferrari F355 Challenge	Sega	●●	61
FIFA 2001 Major League Soccer	EA Sports	●●●●◖	39

COPYCATS

Konami tried to capitalize on the success of franchises like *Tony Hawk* and *SSX* with its dismal *Evolution* games but failed miserably. Why didn't they spend that time and money bringing the awesome *Guitar Freaks* to the U.S.? See page 34 to see who beat them to it.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
FIFA 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	51
FIFA Soccer 2003	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**63**
⚡**FIFA Soccer 2004**	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡**FIFA Soccer 2005**	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**86**
⚡FIFA Street	EA Sports	●●◖	91
Fight Club	Vivendi Universal	●◖	87
⚡**Fight Night 2004**	**EA Sports**	●●●●	**80**
⚡Fight Night Round 2	EA Sports	●●●●◖	91
Fighter Maker 2	Agetec	●◖	64
Final Fantasy X	**Square EA**	●●●●●	**53**
Final Fantasy X-2	**Square Enix USA**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡**Final Fantasy XI**	**Square Enix USA**	●●●●●	**78**
⚡Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	Square Enix USA	●●●●	87
Finding Nemo	**THQ**	●●●◖	**71**
Finny the Fish and the Seven Waters	Natsume	●●	91
Fireblade	Midway	●●◖	59
Fisherman's Challenge	Konami	●●	67
Ford Racing 2	Gotham Games	●●◖	76
Forever Kingdom	Agetec	●◖	53
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	Atari	●●●◖	86
Formula One 2001	Sony CEA	●●◖	50
Freaky Flyers	Midway	●●●◖	72
Freedom Fighters	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**73**
Freekstyle	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●	**59**
Freestyle Metal X	Midway	●●●	71
Frequency	Sony CEA	●●●◖	52
Frogger: The Great Quest	Konami	●◖	53
Frogger's Adventure: The Rescue	Konami	●●◖	76
Front Mission 4	Square Enix	●●●●	82
Fugitive Hunter	Encore	●	76
⚡Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	●●●●	93
Fullmetal Alchemist	Square Enix	●●●	89
Fur Fighters: Viggo's Revenge	Acclaim	●●●	46
Futurama	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	72
Future Tactics: The Uprising	Crave	●●●◖	81
G1 Jockey 3	Koei	●●●◖	69
Gadget Racers	Conspiracy	●●●◖	50
Galactic Wrestling Featuring Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	●●◖	82
Galerians: Ash	Sammy	●◖	66
Gallop Racer	Tecmo	●●	48
Gallop Racer 2003: A New Breed	Tecmo	●●●	69
Gallop Racer 2004	Tecmo	●●●●	85
Gauntlet: Dark Legacy	Midway	●●●◖	46
The Getaway	Sony CEA	●●●●	66
The Getaway: Black Monday	Sony CEA	●●	89
Get on da Mic	Eidos	●●	87
Ghosthunter	Namco	●●◖	84
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	Bandai	●●	87
⚡Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	●●●	89
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	●●●◖	51
Gitaroo-Man	Koei	●●●◖	53
Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim	●●	75
Gladius	LucasArts	●●●●	74
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	Jaleco	●●◖	76
God of War	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**92**
GoDai: Elemental Force	3DO	●◖	54
Godzilla: Save the Earth	Atari	●●◖	88
⚡GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	EA Games	●●●	89
Gradius III and IV	Konami	●●◖	39
Gradius V	Konami	●●●◖	85
Graffiti Kingdom	Hot-B	●●●●	93
Gran Turismo 3: A-spec	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**46**
Gran Turismo 4	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**91**
Grand Prix Challenge	Atari	●●●◖	68
Grand Theft Auto III	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**52**
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**87**
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**63**
Grandia II	Ubisoft	●●●◖	53
Grandia Xtreme	Enix	●●●◖	62
Gravity Games Bike: Street, Vert, Dirt	Midway	◖	61
The Great Escape	Gotham Games	●●●◖	72
⚡Gretzky NHL 2005	Sony CEA	●●◖	88
⚡Growlanser Generations	Working Designs	●●●●	88
GTC Africa	Majesco	●●◖	58
Guilty Gear Isuka	Sammy	●●●●	86
Guilty Gear X	Majesco/Sammy	●●●●	51

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Guilty Gear X2	Sammy	●●●●	66
Gungrave	Sega	●●●◖	61
Gungrave: Overdose	Mastiff	●●●◖	86
GunGriffon Blaze	Working Designs	●●●◖	39
The Guy Game	Gathering	●	85
Half-Life	**Sierra**	●●●●●	**51**
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	**EA Games**	●●●	**75**
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	EA Games	●◖	76
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	EA Games	●●●◖	64
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	EA Games	●●●●	82
Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland	Natsume	●●●●	51
Haunted Mansion	TDK	●●●	77
Haunting Ground	Capcom	●●◖	93
Haven: Call of the King	Midway	●●●◖	64
Headhunter	Acclaim	●●●	57
Headhunter: Redemption	Sega	●●●	86
Herdy Gerdy	Eidos	●●●	56
Heroes of Might and Magic	3DO	●●◖	46
Hidden Invasion	Conspiracy	●●●	60
High Heat MLB 2002	3DO	●●●●	44
High Heat MLB 2003	3DO	●●●●◖	55
High Heat MLB 2004	**3DO**	●●●●●	**67**
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	●●●●◖	81
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	**Eidos**	●●●●◖	**63**
The Hobbit	Vivendi Universal	●●●◖	76
Hot Shots Golf 3	**Sony CEA**	●●●●	**55**
⚡Hot Shots Golf Fore!	Sony CEA	●●●◖	85
⚡Hot Wheels: Stunt Track Challenge	THQ	●●●◖	89
Hot Wheels: Velocity X	THQ	●●◖	64
The Hulk	**Vivendi Universal**	●●●●	**70**
Hunter: The Reckoning–Wayward	Interplay	●●◖	72
Hypersonic Xtreme	Majesco	●●◖	67
I-Ninja	Namco	●●●◖	75
Ico	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**50**
The Incredibles	THQ	●●●◖	88
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	●●●	71
Indy Car Series	Codemasters	●●●	71
Intellivision Lives!	Crave	●●●◖	77
Inuyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask	Bandai	●	89
Island Extreme Stunts	EA Games	●●●◖	65
The Italian Job	Eidos	●●	72
Jade Cocoon 2	Ubisoft	●●●◖	53
Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**52**
Jak II	**Sony CEA**	●●●◖	**74**
Jak 3	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	87
James Bond 007: Agent Under Fire	**EA Games**	●●●●	**52**
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	EA Games	●●●●◖	79
James Bond 007: NightFire	**EA Games**	●●●●◖	**64**
James Cameron's Dark Angel	Sierra	●●	65
Jeopardy!	Atari	●●◖	77
Jeremy McGrath Supercross World	Acclaim	●	53
Jet X20	Sony CEA	●●	63
Jimmy Neutron: Attack of the Twonkies	THQ	●●●	88
Jonny Moseley Mad Trix	3DO	●◖	54
Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death	Evolved Games	●●◖	80
The Jungle Book: Rhythm n' Groove	Ubisoft	●●●	69
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Universal Int.	●●●●◖	68
K-1 World Grand Prix	Konami	●●	71
Karaoke Revolution	Konami	●●●●	75
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	Konami	●●●●◖	83
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	Konami	●●●●◖	87
Katamari Damacy	Namco	●●●●◖	86
Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer	Activision	●●●◖	61
Kengo: Master of Bushido	Crave	●●●	42
Kessen	EA Games	●●●	39
Kessen II	Koei	●●●	51
Kessen III	Koei	●●●	91
kill.switch	**Namco**	●●●●◖	**75**
⚡Killzone	Sony CEA	●●●●	87
Kinetica	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	50
King Arthur	Konami	●	88
King of Fighters 2000/2001	SNK Playmore	●●◖	76
King of Fighters 2002/2003	SNK Playmore	●●●●	88
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	SNK Playmore	●●●	87
The King of Route 66	Sega	●●●	67
King's Field: The Ancient City	Agetec	●●	55

BEHIND THE GAME: DISRUPTOR

THE GAME THAT MADE RATCHET POSSIBLE

***Disruptor* doesn't look** like much by today's standards—a grainy first-person shooter crawling with flat, cardboard-cutout monstrosities. Its motion-sickness-inducing speed and stiff-necked aim make it feel like a relic. Its story brims with sci-fi clichés: war with evil aliens, a plot against the president, and wacky brain-implant weapons (the game's gimmick). The plot unfolds in a series of horribly acted B-movie video clips featuring choice lines like, "Think fast, shoot fast, and kick ass!"

It hasn't aged well, but *Disruptor* serves as an artifact from a lost era, a time when a couple of motivated nobodies could start a game company in their garage and ride the booming industry into massive, blockbuster success.

Insomniac Games is that company. Comfortably spread in a 35,000-square-foot building in perma-sunny Burbank, CA, its games (the *Ratchet & Clank* and *Spyro the Dragon* series) have sold millions of copies. It employs a small army of 120 "insomniacs," who are currently working on a new take on the *Ratchet* formula with *Ratchet: Deadlocked*. But Ted Price, the studio's founder and president, remembers a time when Insomniac was a two-man team—himself and programmer Al Hastings—whose fortunes teetered on their low-budget *Doom* clone, *Disruptor*.

"I think we were very lucky to get out of the *Disruptor* development process alive," says Price. "None of us had ever been in the game business before. We were just guessing that it might be fairly easy to do, and man, were we wrong."

It was 1994. The 3DO, a platform created by EA founder Trip Hawkins, was the cutting edge of game-console technology, a CD-based system retailing for an insane $700. Insomniac took advantage of the CD format's low price and dove into *Disruptor*. Within a year, the rug was pulled out from under the team. "3DO tanked, big time," says Price.

They shopped a demo around to publishers up and down the West Coast, looking to move *Disruptor* over to Sony's newly released PlayStation. It wasn't going well.

"Everybody had turned us down," says Price. "We were down to no money in the bank, and this was really our last shot." Their final meeting was with Mark Cerny, a veteran game designer/producer whose work spans 1984's *Marble Madness* to the recent *Jak and Daxter* series. At that point, Cerny was scouting developer talent for Universal Studios Interactive in Los Angeles. He found it in Insomniac.

"Mark saw the engine that Al [Hastings] had programmed on the 3DO and said, 'Wow, these guys have potential.' We signed a three-game deal with Universal based on that meeting," says Price. "It saved our asses." Ted Price was 24. Al Hastings was 21.

The team had six months to deliver its first playable *Disruptor* build to Universal. "We worked our asses off trying to finish the first playable," says Price. "We brought it up to L.A. to find Mark [Cerny] and the other guys saying, 'Are you crazy? This isn't even close. You guys have to go back and start again.' That was a real blow for us." With a tight schedule and a tighter budget, Price and Hastings, along with Hastings' brother and fellow programmer Brian, moved Insomniac up to L.A., where Universal offered them free office space and, more important, some guidance. "We realized we really needed some advice on how to make a game," says Price.

The three moved into a two-bedroom apartment across the street from their bungalow office at Universal Studios. "We had one bed and a couch and that was it," says Price. "We weren't sleeping much anyway because we were under such tight deadlines. The two people who got to the bed first won, and the other guy lost, 'cause he had to sleep on the couch. That happened for months. It's all kind of a blur."

They weren't the only freshmen developers at Universal that year. Naughty Dog, creators of *Crash Bandicoot* and the *Jak and Daxter* series, moved in right across the hall. "When we were presenting our concept for *Disruptor*, they were presenting their concept for *Crash Bandicoot*," says Price. "We ended up sharing a lot of equipment and testers." They eventually went as far as sharing code.

In October of '96, *Disruptor* was released to critical praise but sold poorly. Price puts some of the blame on Universal's marketing plans: "There wasn't much of a push behind the game. We had maybe two magazine ads and a tour of editors through our little studio when the game came out, and that was it. No TV campaign, no nothing."

"THINK FAST, SHOOT FAST, AND KICK ASS!"

It couldn't have helped that the PlayStation was already home to some notably bad first-person shooters, rightfully forgotten games such as *PO'ed* and *Powerslave*. "The market was surprisingly bad in terms of quality first-person shooters, but there wasn't much of a market anyway," says Price. "People were just not playing FPSes on consoles at the time."

After *Disruptor*'s poor showing on store shelves, Insomniac took a sharp turn. "We wanted to move away from the dark theme and do something more lighthearted, and that's where *Spyro* came in," says Price. *Spyro the Dragon* carried Insomniac from dark sci-fi shooter to purple dragon adventure and became its fist hit, a franchise that has sold more than 12 million copies to date. Its *Ratchet & Clank* series consistently takes home year-end awards from the gaming press, and has sold an estimated 6 million copies.

Disruptor was a transitional game in a transitional time, awkwardly stuck between the 2D and 3D eras. It was a baby step for the fledgling PlayStation, a learning experience for the game's creators, and a prelude to their massive success. If you find it in your local used-game store (it sells for around $5), pick it up and take a break from Hollywood production values. Let the rough edges and bad acting remind you that there was a time when a couple of guys with no money or experience could stumble their way into videogame fame and fortune. « *Robert Ashley*

PENNY ARCADE

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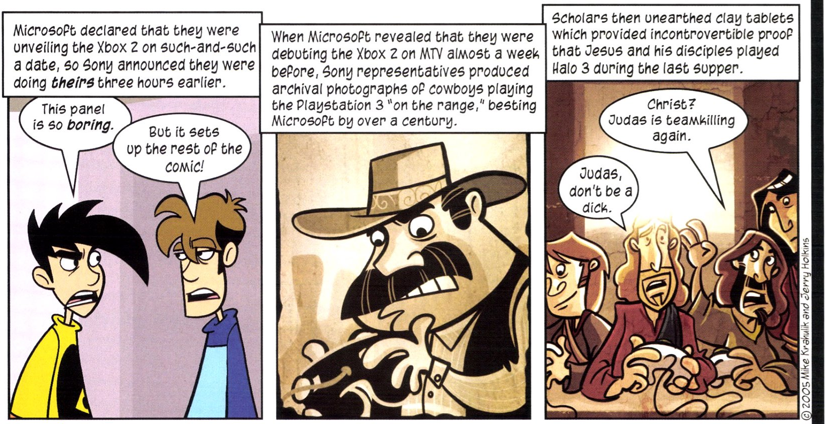
Microsoft declared that they were unveiling the Xbox 2 on such-and-such a date, so Sony announced they were doing *theirs* three hours earlier.
This panel is so *boring*.
But it sets up the rest of the comic!
When Microsoft revealed that they were debuting the Xbox 2 on MTV almost a week before, Sony representatives produced archival photographs of cowboys playing the Playstation 3 "on the range," besting Microsoft by over a century.
Scholars then unearthed clay tablets which provided incontrovertible proof that Jesus and his disciples played Halo 3 during the last supper.
Christ? Judas is teamkilling again.
Judas, don't be a dick.
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GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Kingdom Hearts	**Square EA**	**●●●●◖**	**61**
Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	Namco	●●●●◖	47
Knockout Kings 2001	EA Sports	●●●●	42
Knockout Kings 2002	EA Sports	●●●●	55
Kuon	Agetec	●●◖	87
Kya: Dark Lineage	Atari	●●◖	76
La Pucelle: Tactics	Mastiff	●●●●	81
Le Mans 24 Hours	Infogrames	●●◖	48
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	●●◖	76
Legaia 2: Duel Saga	Fresh Games	●●●	63
The Legend of Alon D'ar	Ubisoft	●◖	54
Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim	●●◖	53
Legends of Wrestling II	Acclaim	●●●	65
Legion: The Legend of Excalibur	Midway	●●●	59
Lego Racers 2	Lego Media	●●◖	51
Lego Star Wars	Giant Int.	●●●●	92
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	87
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	Activision	●●	89
Lethal Skies	Sammy	●●●	58
Lethal Skies II	Sammy	●●●◖	74
Looney Tunes: Back in Action	EA Games	●	76
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring	Black Label	●●●◖	63
⚡The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	**EA Games**	**●●●●●**	**75**
The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age	EA Games	●●	88
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	**EA Games**	**●●●●◖**	**63**
Lowrider	Jaleco	●◖	77
Lupin the 3rd: Treasure of the Sorcerer King	Bandai	●●●◖	78
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi Universal	●●	71
Mad Maestro!	Eidos/Fresh	●●●	56
Madden NFL 2001	EA Sports	●●●●◖	38
Madden NFL 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	48
⚡Madden NFL 2003	**EA Sports**	**●●●●●**	**60**
⚡Madden NFL 2004	**EA Sports**	**●●●●●**	**72**

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Malice didn't live up to its early hype, but it's still a fair sight better than the abominable 1993 movie of the same name, which starred Alec Baldwin, Bill Pullman, and Nicole Kidman.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
⚡Madden NFL 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◖	83
Mafia	Gathering	●●●◖	79
Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color	Agetec	●●●●	69
⚡Major League Baseball 2K5	2K Games	●●●●	91
Malice	Mud Duck	●●◖	84
Manhunt	**Rockstar**	**●●●◖**	**76**
The Mark of Kri	Sony CEA	●●●	59
Marvel vs. Capcom 2	Capcom	●●●●	61
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2	Activision	●●●●	60
Max Payne	**Rockstar**	**●●●●**	**53**
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	Rockstar	●●●◖	77
Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	**Capcom**	**●●●◖**	**54**
Maximo vs. Army of Zin	Capcom	●●●●	77
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	Konami	◖	84
MDK2 Armageddon	Interplay	●●●◖	45
Medal of Honor: Frontline	**EA Games**	**●●●●●**	**58**
⚡Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	**EA Games**	**●●●◖**	**76**
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	Capcom	●●●◖	83
Mega Man X: Command Mission	Capcom	●●●◖	86
Mega Man X7	Capcom	●●●◖	74
Mega Man X8	Capcom	●●●	88
Men in Black II: Alien Escape	Infogrames	●●◖	60
Mercenaries	LucasArts	●●●●◖	89
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	Vivendi Universal	●●●●	75
Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty	**Konami**	**●●●●●**	**51**
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	**Konami**	**●●●●●**	**67**
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	**Konami**	**●●●●●**	**88**
Metropolismania	Natsume	●●●	61
Midnight Club	**Rockstar**	**●●●●**	**39**
⚡Midnight Club II	**Rockstar**	**●●●●●**	**67**
⚡Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	●●●●	93
Midway Arcade Treasures	Midway	●●●◖	76
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	Midway	●●●●	87

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Mike Tyson Heavyweight Boxing	Codemasters	●	58
Minority Report	Activision	●●◖	65
Mission: Impossible–Operation Surma	Atari	●●	77
Mister Mosquito	Eidos/Fresh	●●●◖	56
MLB 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	67
⚡MLB 2005	Sony CEA	●●●◖	80
⚡MLB 2006	Sony CEA	●●●◖	91
MLB SlugFest 20-03	Midway	●●●●	59
MLB SlugFest 20-04	Midway	●●●●	67
⚡MLB SlugFest: Loaded	Midway	●●●◖	83
Mobile Light Force 2	XS Games	●●●◖	69
Mobile Suit Gundam: Encounters in Space	Bandai	●	75
Mobile Suit Gundam: Federation vs. Zeon	Bandai	●●●◖	61
Mobile Suit Gundam: Journey to Jaburo	Bandai	●	48
Mobile Suit Gundam: Zeonic Front	Bandai	●●●	54
Mojo!	Crave	●●◖	73
Monopoly Party	Infogrames	●●●	65
Monster 4x4: Masters of Metal	Ubisoft	●●◖	77
Monster Hunter	Capcom	●●●●	86
Monster Rancher 3	Tecmo	●●●●	50
Monster Rancher 4	Tecmo	●●●◖	75
Monsters, Inc.	Sony CEA	●●●◖	55
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	**Midway**	**●●●●**	**64**
⚡Mortal Kombat: Deception	Midway	●●●●	87
MotoGP	Namco	●●●●	39
MotoGP 2	Namco	●●●●◖	53
MotoGP 3	Namco	●●●●◖	67
Motor Mayhem	Infogrames	●●●	47
MTV Music Generator 2	Codemasters	●●●	46
MTV Music Generator 3: This Is the Remix	Codemasters	●●●◖	82
MTV's Celebrity Deathmatch	Gotham Games	●◖	76
⚡MTX: Mototrax	Activision	●●◖	80
The Mummy Returns	Universal	●◖	52

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Musashi Samurai Legend	Square Enix	●●●	91
Music Maker	Magix	●●●●	69
MVP Baseball 2003	EA Sports	●●●◖	67
⚡MVP Baseball 2004	EA Sports	●●●●◖	80
⚡MVP Baseball 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◖	91

Create a character with these names.

PLAYER HAS A HUGE BAT	Keegan Paterson
PLAYER HAS A HUGE BAT	Jacob Paterson
PLAYER HAS A HUGE BAT	Isaiah Paterson
RED SOX ST. PATRICK'S DAY JERSEY	Neverlose Sight

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
MX 2002 Featuring Ricky Carmichael	THQ	●●●●	47
MX Rider	Infogrames	●●●◖	52
MX Superfly Featuring Ricky Carmichael	THQ	●●●◖	59
⚡MX vs. ATV Unleashed	THQ	●●●●	91

Enter these passwords in the Cheats menu.

1,000,000 POINTS	BROKEASAJOKE
ALL FREESTYLE TRACKS	HUCKIT
ALL GEAR	WARDROBE
ALL MACHINES	LEADFOOT
ALL RIDERS	WANNABE
UNLOCK EVERYTHING	TOOLAZY
UNLOCK 50CC BIKES	MINIMOTO

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
⚡My Street	Sony CEA	●●●	67
Myst III: Exile	Ubisoft	●●●◖	63
Mystic Heroes	Koei	●●◖	64
MX Unleashed	**THQ**	●●●	**79**
Namco Museum	**Namco**	●●●◖	**53**
Nano Breaker	Konami	●●◖	90
NARC	Midway	◖	93
NASCAR 2001	EA Sports	●●◖	40
⚡NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**85**
NASCAR Heat	Infogrames	●●●●	47
NASCAR Thunder 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	51
NASCAR Thunder 2003	EA Sports	●●●●◖	62
⚡NASCAR Thunder 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**73**
NASCAR: Dirt to Daytona	Infogrames	●●●◖	63
Naval Ops: Warship Gunner	Koei	●●●	71
NBA 2K2	**Sega Sports**	●●●●●	**53**
⚡NBA 2K3	**Sega Sports**	●●●●●	**63**
NBA Ballers	Midway Sports	●●●●	80
NBA Hoopz	Midway	●●●	44
NBA Jam 2004	Acclaim	●●◖	75
NBA Live 2001	EA Sports	●●●	42
NBA Live 2002	EA Sports	●●◖	51
⚡NBA Live 2003	EA Sports	●●●●	63
⚡NBA Live 2004	EA Sports	●●●●◖	75
⚡NBA Live 2005	EA Sports	●●●●	86
NBA ShootOut 2001	Sony CEA	●●◖	44
NBA ShootOut 2003	Sony CEA	●●●	63
⚡NBA ShootOut 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	75
NBA Starting Five	Konami	●●◖	63
NBA Street	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**47**
NBA Street Vol. 2	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**68**
⚡NBA Street V3	EA Sports Big	●●●●◖	90
⚡NCAA College Basketball 2K3	Sega Sports	●●●●	64
NCAA College Football 2K3	Sega Sports	●●◖	60
NCAA Final Four 2001	Sony CEA	●	41
NCAA Final Four 2002	Sony CEA	●◖	52
NCAA Final Four 2003	Sony CEA	●●◖	64
⚡NCAA Final Four 2004	Sony CEA	●●	76
NCAA Football 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	48
NCAA Football 2003	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**60**
⚡NCAA Football 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**71**
⚡NCAA Football 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◖	83
NCAA GameBreaker 2001	Sony CEA	●◖	41
NCAA GameBreaker 2003	Sony CEA	●●	61
⚡NCAA GameBreaker 2004	Sony CEA	●●◖	73
NCAA March Madness 2002	EA Sports	●●●	53
NCAA March Madness 2003	EA Sports	●●●	64
⚡NCAA March Madness 2004	EA Sports	●●●●	76
⚡NCAA March Madness 2005	EA Sports	●●●◖	88
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**62**
⚡Need for Speed Underground	**EA Games**	●●●●◖	**76**
⚡Need for Speed Underground 2	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**87**

RPG-A-LICIOUS

Fans of *Phantom Brave* will be pleased to know that NIS America is coming out with a new title, *Makai Kingdom*. To find out more, turn to the preview on page 44 or take a look at the trailer that's on this month's disc.

WE HEART DEVELOPERS

The *OPM* editors are huge fans of the work of Tetsuya Mizuguchi, who is the creator of both *Lumines* (our favorite PSP puzzle game) and *Rez*. To find out more about him, pay a visit to his blog—you'll find it at **mizuguchi.1UP.com**.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Neo Contra	Konami	●●●◖	87
NFL 2K2	**Sega Sports**	●●●◖	**52**
⚡NFL 2K3	Sega Sports	●●●●◖	60
NFL Blitz 20-02	Midway	●●●●	55
NFL Blitz 20-03	Midway	●●●◖	60
⚡NFL Blitz Pro	Midway Sports	●●●	74
NFL GameDay 2001	Sony CEA	●	40
NFL GameDay 2002	Sony CEA	●◖	53
⚡NFL GameDay 2003	Sony CEA	●●◖	61
⚡NFL GameDay 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	73
NFL Quarterback Club 2001	Acclaim	●●◖	50
⚡NFL Street	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●◖	**78**
⚡NFL Street 2	EA Sports Big	●●●◖	89
NHL 2001	EA Sports	●●●●	38
NHL 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	50
NHL 2003	EA Sports	●●●◖	63
⚡NHL 2004	EA Sports	●●●●	73
⚡NHL 2005	EA Sports	●●●◖	85
NHL 2K3	**Sega Sports**	●●●●●	**64**
NHL FaceOff 2001	Sony CEA	●●●◖	43
NHL FaceOff 2003	Sony CEA	●●	64
NHL Hitz 20-02	Midway	●●●●	51
NHL Hitz 20-03	Midway	●●●●◖	62
⚡NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	●●●●	73
Nick Toons: Movin'	THQ	●●●	88
Nightmare of Druaga	Namco	●●	87
Ninja Assault	Namco	●●◖	61
No One Lives Forever	Sierra	●●●◖	56
Obscure	DreamCatcher	●●	93
Okage: Shadow King	Sony CEA	●●●	51
Oni	Rockstar	●◖	43
Onimusha: Warlords	**Capcom**	●●●●	**43**
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	**Capcom**	●●●●	**60**
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	Capcom	●●●●◖	81
Orphen: Scion of Sorcery	Activision	●●●	39
⚡Outlaw Golf 2	Global Star	●◖	88
Pac-Man Fever	Namco	●●	60
Pac-Man World 2	**Namco**	●●●●◖	**54**
PaRappa the Rapper 2	Sony CEA	●●●◖	53
Paris-Dakar Rally	Acclaim	●●	53
Phantom Brave	NIS America	●●●●◖	85
Pinball Hall of Fame	Crave	●◖	90
Pirates: The Legend of Black Kat	EA Games	●●●◖	55
Pitfall: The Lost Expedition	Activision	●●	80
Playboy: The Mansion	Arush Ent.	●●	91
The Polar Express	THQ	●●●	88
Pool Paradise	Ignition	●●●◖	83
Portal Runner	3DO	●●	50
Power Drome	Mud Duck	●	84
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	THQ	●●	88
The Powerpuff Girls: Relish Rampage	Bam	●●	65
Pride FC	THQ	●●●●	65
Primal	Sony CEA	●●●●	68
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	**Ubisoft**	●●●●●	**75**
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	●●●●	88
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	●●●●◖	65
Project Eden	Eidos	●●●◖	52
⚡Project: Snowblind	Eidos	●●●●	91
Pryzm Chapter One: The Dark Unicorn	TDK Mediactive	●●◖	60
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	●●●●◖	82
P.T.O. IV	Koei	●●●	66
The Punisher	THQ	●●●◖	90

To get the following code to work, you'll have to wear a skull T-shirt and a leather jacket. Entering the code unlocks all of the extra goodies in *The Punisher*, from comic-book covers to all weapons cheats.

EVERYTHING UNLOCKED (EXCEPT UPGRADES)

Enter "V Pirate" as a profile name.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Q-Ball Billiards Master	Take-Two	●●●◖	40
Quake III: Revolution	EA Games	●●●●◖	44
R: Racing Evolution	Namco	●●●●	76
R-Type Final	Eidos/Fresh Games	●●●●	78
Rally Fusion: Race of Champions	Activision	●●●	64
Rapala Pro Fishing	Activision	●●◖	85
Ratchet & Clank	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**63**

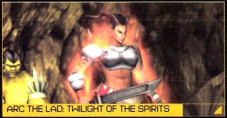
GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**87**
Rayman 2: Revolution	**Ubisoft**	●●●●●	**41**
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	Ubisoft	●●●◖	67
Rayman Arena	Ubisoft	●●●◖	57
RC Revenge Pro	Acclaim	●●◖	41
Ready 2 Rumble Boxing Round 2	Midway	●●●●	40
Real Pool	Infogrames	●●●◖	40
Red Card Soccer 20-03	Midway	●●●	57
Red Dead Revolver	Rockstar	●●●●	82
Red Faction	**THQ**	●●●●●	**46**
Red Faction II	THQ	●●●●	63
Red Ninja: End of Honor	Vivendi Universal	●●	92
Reel Fishing III	Natsume	●●●●	72
Reign of Fire	Bam	●●●◖	63
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	**Capcom**	●●●●◖	**48**
Resident Evil: Dead Aim	Capcom	●●●◖	70
⚡Resident Evil Outbreak	Capcom	●●●◖	81
⚡Resident Evil Outbreak: File #2	Capcom	●◖	92
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: OR	Activision	●●●◖	71
Rez	Sega	●●●●◖	53
Ribbit King	Bandai	●●●	82
Ridge Racer V	Namco	●●●●◖	38
Riding Spirits	Bam	●●●◖	61
Ring of Red	Konami	●●●●	43
Rise of the Kasai	Sony CEA	●●●◖	92
Rise to Honor	**Sony CEA**	●●●	**78**
⚡Risk: Global Domination	Atari	●●●●	73
RLH: Run Like Hell	Interplay	●●●	62
Road Kill	Midway	●●●●	74
Road Trip	Conspiracy	●●●●	61
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	Capcom	●●◖	74
Robotech: Invasion	Global Star	●●●	86
Robots	Vivendi Universal	●	92
Rocky	Ubisoft	●●●●	64
Rocky Legends	Ubisoft	●●◖	87
Robot Alchemic Drive	Enix	●●●●	63
Robotech: Battlecry	TDK	●●●◖	62
Rogue Ops	Kemco	●●◖	75
Romance of the Three Kingdoms VII	Koei	●●◖	60
Romance of the Three Kingdoms VIII	Koei	●●●	73
RPG Maker 2	Agetec	●●●◖	74
RTX Red Rock	LucasArts	●●	71
Rugby	EA Sports	●●●◖	48
Rugby 2004	EA Sports	●●●	73
Rugby 2005	EA Sports	●●◖	91
Rumble Racing	EA Games	●●●●◖	45
Rumble Roses	Konami	●●●	88
Rune: Viking Warlord	Take-Two	●●◖	48
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	●●●●◖	64
Salt Lake 2002	Eidos	●●◖	55
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	Sega	●●●●	80
Samurai Warriors	Koei/EA	●●●●	81
Samurai Warriors: Xtreme Legends	Koei	●●●	88
Saturday Night Speedway	Atari	●●◖	81
Savage Skies	Bam	●●●	56
Scaler	Global Star	●●●●	88
Scooby-Doo! Mystery Mayhem	THQ	●●●	81
Scooby-Doo! Night of 100 Frights	**THQ**	●●●	**58**
The Scorpion King: Rise of the Akkadian	Universal	●●	62
SD Gundam Force: Showdown!	Bandai	●●●◖	88
Second Sight	Codemasters	●●●●	86
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	●●●●	75
Seek and Destroy	Conspiracy	●●●◖	66
Sega Bass Fishing Duel	Sega	●●●	62
Sega Classics Collection	Sega	●●	90
Sega Soccer Slam	Sega Sports	●●	62
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega Sports	●●●●◖	60
Sega Superstars	Sega	●●●●	88
⚡Serious Sam: Next Encounter	Global Star	●●●◖	81
Seven Samurai 20XX	Sammy	●●	80
Shadow Hearts	Midway	●●●●	52
Shadow Hearts: Covenant	Midway	●●●●	86
Shadow of Destiny	Konami	●●●◖	43
Shadow of Rome	Capcom	●●●●	89
Shadow Man: 2econd Coming	Acclaim	●●	57

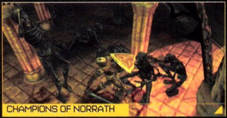
20 ESSENTIAL RPGS

WHEN ROLL CALL HAPPENS, HERE'S WHAT TO PLAY

PlayStation gamers have been fortunate to be on the receiving end of a plethora of good role-playing games over the years. While not all of these games may appeal to everyone, true RPG fans should give each one a look.

.HACK// SERIES


ARC THE LAD: TWILIGHT OF THE SPIRITS


CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH

DARK CLOUD 2

FINAL FANTASY X

FINAL FANTASY X-2

FINAL FANTASY XI

Attack
Magic
KINGDOM HEARTS

MAGIC PENGEL: THE QUEST FOR COLOR

MONSTER RANCHER 3

PLAYSTATION 2

.HACK// SERIES

While this RPG series has its fair share of faults, it's still worth a look just for the new ground it broke. The serialized gameplay, spread out across four separate chapters, is able to simulate a massively multiplayer online world, despite being neither massively multiplayer nor online. Fans of MMORPGs will definitely want to give these games a try.

ARC THE LAD: TWILIGHT OF THE SPIRITS

A strictly by-the-book RPG, *Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits* introduced the popular Japanese series to the PS2. While not a visual stunner, its RPG features are buttressed by a strong story—the conflict between humans and deimos (intelligent monsters) told from the perspective of brothers Kharg and Darc—which makes this one a keeper. Want to see it for yourself? Try the demo, conveniently located on this month's disc.

CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EVERQUEST

For those who like their RPGs on the light side, *Champions* (along with its sequel) offers classic *Diablo*-style play. Hack and slash your way through the melodramatic story line to save the world from falling to Innoruuk, the Prince of Hate. Or just hack and slash your way to getting cool new loot, like an efreeti war ax with 178-205 damage!

DARK CLOUD 2

This is a game in which you can have a kid jump into a robot clown and have it punch evil trees and stuff. Do you need more reasons to try this game? How about the ability to create towns, invent new weapons, or learn how to be a good photographer? Still not interested? You're dead to us.

FINAL FANTASY X

The 10th game in the *Final Fantasy* series holds special significance due to the introduction of voice acting. *X* also introduced a new character-swap system, making battles more interesting and dynamic. And who could forget blitz ball—a side quest that could've easily been its own game.

FINAL FANTASY X-2

Finally, you can fulfill your dream of playing as three totally hot fashionistas who save the world with their wardrobes! OK, this isn't as heavy or deep as the previous *Final Fantasy* games, but we applaud its experimental foray into a less linear world and its use of different clothes as weapons. Well, we really just like playing as women who fight monsters with their fabulous skirts. Check out the original demo on this month's disc.

FINAL FANTASY XI

While not the first MMORPG on the PS2, it is definitely the first successful one, sucking console gamers into the evil and addictive world of a persistent online universe. Just ask *OPM* art director Ryan Vulk—in the span of one year, he's spent more than 100 real-time days in the game. We're not quite sure how he has time to do his job....

KINGDOM HEARTS

Combining Disney and Square characters seems ridiculous, but *Kingdom Hearts* pulls it off. The straightforward combat combined with amazing locations and characters attracts Disney and Square Enix fans alike. And while the Gummi ship portions leave something to be desired, the rest of the game is top-notch. Watch the trailer on the disc to see for yourself.

MAGIC PENGEL: THE QUEST FOR COLOR

Magic Pengel is just one of those games that's charming and has a unique style. For starters, it lets you design your own characters through a doodling system that instantly changes anything you draw into a 3D model. Plus, who can resist those sickeningly cute paintbrush-equipped pengels?

MONSTER RANCHER 3

In a convincing answer to the *Pokémon* craze, Tecmo's *Monster Rancher* line (*4* shipped in 2003) lets you breed, train, and fight with—yep—monsters. *MR3*, generally regarded as the series' best, scrapped the familiar farm system in favor of large, open regions, with a greater emphasis on training and combat. Cooler still, *MR3* introduced the ability to import your face into the game. Breed, monster, breed!

Double Trouble
PHANTOM BRAVE

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: NOCTURNE

RANGE SHORT
Sphere of Might
SPECIAL ATTACK
123
STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

XENOSAGA EPISODE I

DRAGON WARRIOR VII

FINAL FANTASY VII

Marche
HP 59/ 59
MP 16/ 16
ACTION
Fight
Battle Tech
FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

THE LEGEND OF DRAGOON

STAR OCEAN: THE SECOND STORY

XENOGEARS

PHANTOM BRAVE

If you're only going to play one weird strategy-RPG, then go with this one. We could talk on and on about how you create units by confining the souls of warriors in everyday objects, but that's just ruining the fun. It's cheap, too!

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: NOCTURNE

To say this is *Pokémon* plus *Paradise Lost* plus *Final Fantasy* is to barely get into it. It's got a crazy story about demons and postapocalyptic conquest, it portrays Lucifer as a doddering wheelchair rider, and it makes the act of fusing angels and demons and ice monsters into weirder creatures a whole lot of fun. Plus, it has the most Japanese name on this list.

STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

It's a flawed but valiant effort to supply RPG gamers with a huge sci-fi epic that eats up lots of game time and features quirky real-time combat. Plus, it has the trippiest ending since the time you had to read a book in *Ultima IV*.

XENOSAGA EPISODE I: DER WILLE ZUR MACHT

This is more of an anime-style treatise on theology than an RPG. If you want to see a massive space opera that makes you wonder why you're alive and what you should do with your life, then this is a good start. Besides, it has a really hot robot woman as the main character.

PLAYSTATION

DRAGON WARRIOR VII

This is a fine history lesson in which great gameplay is coupled with not-amazing graphics. But if you love killing things and running around in dungeons, you'll be hard-pressed to find a better game. It also provides good prep background for *Dragon Quest VIII*, which looks pretty awesome (see page 40).

FINAL FANTASY VII

If any game is responsible for introducing RPGs to the masses, it's *Final Fantasy VII*. Its deep (and occasionally convoluted) story, along with its amazing cut-scenes, provides a cinematic experience that few other games have matched. It's no wonder the game's fans still ask about Aeris to this day.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

One word summarizes *Final Fantasy Tactics*: depth. The Shakespearean story of betrayal and murder and the expansive class training system are just two of the reasons *Tactics* can suck away hours upon hours of your day without you even knowing it. It also gets the award for having the most shanking of any videogame.

THE LEGEND OF DRAGOON

This visually awesome game was Sony's answer to the frenzy stirred up by *Final Fantasy VII*. While disparaged by some, it inspired many gamers to rabid fandom. Just how fanatic are these people? Well, *OPM* has received more mail asking whether there will be a sequel to *Legend of the Dragoon* than it has for any other game.

STAR OCEAN: THE SECOND STORY

If you like big, sprawling RPGs but aren't so big a fan of *Final Fantasy*, then *Star Ocean* is probably more your cup of tea. Its sprawling worlds and pretty graphics drew gamers in, but they were kept there by the endlessly branching story lines. In fact, it is so sprawling that your choices can result in more than 80 endings. Talk about replayability.

XENOGEARS

If you liked all the theological space opera-ness of *Xenosaga*, then hunt down this game. It's even weirder and more theological, but it still features fun fights using big robots. One word of caution, however: Don't get this game if you're sensitive to alternative portrayals of God (this applies to *Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne* also).

THE SPORTS GUY

PSP SPORTS GAMES ARE A BOMB!

TODD ZUNIGA
is no longer a freelance writer living in New York City. He is leaving the freelance ranks to publish the print version of his website, OpiumMagazine.com, amongst other things.

I'm not going to mince words: The sports situation on PSP is dire, rife with turds. Sony's *MLB* serves as the cruelest illusion; it's a fantastic game for a short time but ultimately leads to an endless string of swings and misses and 13-game losing streaks.

Other failings are more obvious, like the grim *FIFA* experience that mirrors the flawed console iteration. This game is a real mind melter overall, making me hate myself because there's no changing the lame button configuration (isn't this 2005?), which turns me into a blithering idiot when I go back to my PS2 to play a differently button schemed *Winning Eleven*.

Other sporting subpars include *Gretzky NHL*, which is solid but simple; *NBA*, because it makes shooting the ball stupidly challenging; and *World Tour Soccer*, because the difficulty setting changes the AI from being vulgarly poor to Berlin Wall effective.

This leaves us with two sports games that aren't sports games at all—they're golf games. *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* and *Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee*. Whoop-de-freakin'-do. While I'm an avid *Hot Shot*-ter, this pared-down excuse for a game features only six courses!

The way I see it, *MVP* and *Madden* are the future of sports gaming on the PSP—as is *Winning Eleven* if Konami ever steps up and gets its game playable on the go.

Seeing as it's baseball season—the most wonderful time of the year—I want to say a few things about the current crop of hardball titles. First, though, let me acknowledge that a baseball game is a pain to build. One hiccup of note is the animation of base runners in *Major League Baseball 2K5*, which is, at times, laughable. After being called out, runners jog back to the dugout without breaking stride or altering their form. Still, I'm addicted to the game—in part because I know it'll be around next year. Which brings me to *MVP*—rumor has it that EA might try to release one more version of the game before the year's out because it'll still have access to the MLB license.

Moving on, my Sports Guy in-box is full, so it's high time I take a page from ESPN's *Pardon the Interruption* and play the role of Mr. Tony for my scaled-down version of Mail Time.

Jeff Belsky wrote me a novella about 989's return to prominence, with *MLB 2006* leading the way (obviously he didn't spend much time with the NHL or NBA on PSP). He says: "I never thought I'd [say this]: 989 Sports' *MLB 2006* is the best baseball game this year if you're a baseball junkie." Fair enough...if you don't run into the random game crashes. I say *MVP* is this year's shining star—it's tough to pull away from the pitching minigame, and only ball physics that could be improved, tricky baserunning, and the fact that it's the last year for the franchise keep it from legendary status. For now, it's the Mark Fidrych of games—gone before its time.

James J. Williams III asks, "Now that *Major League Baseball 2K5* [publisher Take-Two] has exclusive third-party [MLB] rights, will it still [sell the game for] $20?" Fat chance. Now that EA is out of the picture, expect the next game in the series to hit around $40, if not $50.

And finally, Todd Zuniga asks, "When is *Winning Eleven 8* coming to PSP?" No idea, but it'd better be soon—I'm stuck hating myself for trading off between *FIFA* and *World Tour Soccer*! «

THE LAME BUTTON CONFIGURATION TURNS ME INTO A BLITHERING IDIOT.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Shaman King: Power of Spirit	Konami	●●◖	89
Shark Tale	Activision	●●◖	88
Shaun Palmer's Pro Snowboarder	Activision	●●◖	52
ShellShock: Nam '67	Eidos	●●	85
Shifters	3DO	●	58
Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga	Atlus	●●●●	92
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	Atlus	●●●●◖	86
Shining Tears	Sega	●●●	90
Shinobi	Sega	●●●◖	63
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim	●◖	83
Shox	EA Sports Big	●●●◖	63
Shrek 2	Activision	●●●◖	82
Shrek Super Party	TDK Mediactive	●●◖	64
Siren	Sony CEA	●●●	81
Silent Hill 2	**Konami**	●●●●◖	**50**
Silent Hill 3	Konami	●●●●◖	71
Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami	●●●●◖	85
Silent Line: Armored Core	Agetec	●●●◖	70
Silent Scope	Konami	●●●	39
Silent Scope 2	Konami	●●●◖	49
Silent Scope 3	Konami	●●●◖	62
Silpheed: The Lost Planet	Working Designs	●●●◖	40
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	●●●●	72
The Simpsons: Road Rage	**EA Games**	●●●	**52**
The Simpsons Skateboarding	EA Games	●◖	64
The Sims	EA Games	●●●●	65
⚡The Sims: Bustin' Out	EA Games	●●●●◖	76
Sitting Ducks	Hip Interactive	●●●	88
Sky Gunner	Atlus	●●●◖	58
Sky Odyssey	Activision	●●●	40
Sled Storm	EA Sports Big	●●●◖	55
Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**62**

WHAT WE SAID:
"Spawn Armageddon [takes the series] from merely mediocre to appallingly bad. Think of it as *Devil May Cape*, now with extra jumping and idiocy."

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Sly 2: Band of Thieves	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**86**
Smash Cars	Metro3D	●●●◖	71
Smash Court Tennis: Pro Tournament	Namco	●●●◖	56
Smash Court Tennis: Pro Tournament 2	Namco	●●●●	82
Smuggler's Run	**Rockstar**	●●●●◖	**39**
Smuggler's Run 2: Hostile Territory	Rockstar	●●●●◖	52
Soccer America: International Cup	Hot-B	●●	48
Soccer Mania	EA/Lego	●●●◖	59
⚡SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**60**
⚡SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**75**
Soldier of Fortune	Majesco	●●●	52
Sonic Heroes	Sega	●●	77
Sonic Mega Collection	Sega	●●●	88
Soul Calibur II	**Namco**	●●●●●	**72**
Soul Reaver 2	Eidos	●●●	52
Space Channel 5 Special Edition	Sega	●●●◖	75
Space Race	Infogrames	●●◖	59
Spawn Armageddon	Namco	●◖	76
Speed Kings	Acclaim	●●●●	70
Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	THQ	●●●◖	75
Spider-Man	**Activision**	●●●●◖	**57**
Spider-Man 2	Activision	●●●◖	84
Splashdown	Infogrames	●●●●	52
Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild	**THQ**	●●●●●	**72**
SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom	THQ	●●●●◖	75
SpongeBob SquarePants: The Movie	THQ	●●●●◖	87
Spy Fiction	Sammy	●●	85
SpyHunter	**Midway**	●●●●◖	**50**
SpyHunter 2	Midway	●●●	76
Spyro: Enter the Dragonfly	**Vivendi Universal**	●●●	**64**
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Vivendi Universal	●●	87
⚡SRS: Street Racing Syndicate	Namco	●●●	64

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
SSX	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**38**
SSX Tricky	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**52**
⚡SSX 3	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**74**
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	Square Enix	●●●●	84
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	TDK	●●	75
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force	Majesco	●●◖	53
Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	●●●●◖	86
Star Wars Bounty Hunter	**LucasArts**	●●●	**64**
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	LucasArts	●●●	65
Star Wars Super Bombad Racing	LucasArts	●●	45
Star Wars Jedi Starfighter	LucasArts	●●●◖	56
Star Wars Racer Revenge	LucasArts	●●●●◖	55
Star Wars Starfighter	**LucasArts**	●●●●◖	**43**
Starsky & Hutch	Gotham Games	●●	74
State of Emergency	**Rockstar**	●●●	**55**
Stella Deus: The Gate of Eternity	Atlus	●●●●	93
Stitch: Experiment 626	Sony CEA	●●◖	59
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	●●●●	84
Street Fighter EX 3	Capcom	●●●◖	39
Street Hoops	**Activision**	●●●◖	**60**
Stretch Panic	Conspiracy	●●●◖	47
Strike Force Bowling	Crave	●◖	82
Stuntman	**Infogrames/Atari**	●●●	**59**
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	●●●●	62
The Suffering	Midway	●●●	80
Suikoden III	Konami	●●●	63
Suikoden IV	Konami	●●●	89
Summer Heat Beach Volleyball	Acclaim	●●●◖	72
Summoner	THQ	●●●	39
Summoner 2	THQ	●●●◖	62
Sunny Garcia Surfing	Ubisoft	●●●◖	51
Super Bust-A-Move	Acclaim	●●●	41

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Super Bust-A-Move 2	Ubisoft	●●●◖	63
Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	●●●	92
Super Trucks Racing	XS Games	●◖	76
Supercar Street Challenge	Activision	●●◖	52
Superman: Shadow of Apokolips	Atari	●●●◖	63
Surfing H30	Rockstar	●●	40
SWAT: Global Strike Team	Sierra	●●●	74
Swing Away Golf	EA Games	●●●	38
⚡Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	Sony CEA	●●●	81
Taiko: Drum Master	Namco	●●●●	87
Tak and the Power of Juju	**THQ**	**●●●◖**	**75**
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	THQ	●●●◖	88
Tarzan: Untamed	Ubisoft	●●●◖	52
Taz: Wanted	Infogrames	●●●◖	60
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	●●◖	75
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2	Konami	●	86
Tekken 4	**Namco**	**●●●◖**	**61**
Tekken 5	Namco	●●●●	92
Tekken Tag Tournament	**Namco**	**●●●●◖**	**39**
Technic Beat	Mastiff	●●●	89
Tenchu: Fatal Shadows	Sega	●●	90
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	●●●	67
The Terminator: Dawn of Fate	Atari	●●◖	63
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	Atari	●◖	77
Terminator 3: The Redemption	Atari	●●●◖	86
Test Drive	**Infogrames**	**●●●◖**	**58**
Test Drive Off-Road: Wide Open	Infogrames	●●●	48
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	Atari	●●●●	85
Tetris Worlds	THQ	●●	57
Theme Park Roller Coaster	EA Games	●●●●	41
The Thing	Universal	●●●	62
Thunderstrike: Operation Phoenix	Eidos	●◖	52
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2001	EA Sports	●●●	44
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2002	EA Sports	●●●●	55
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	EA Sports	●●●●◖	63
⚡Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	**EA Sports**	**●●●●●**	**73**
⚡Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◖	86
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Time Crisis 3	Namco	●●●●◖	74
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	Namco	●●●◖	86
TimeSplitters	**Eidos**	**●●●●●**	**39**
TimeSplitters 2	**Eidos**	**●●●●●**	**63**
⚡TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	**EA Games**	**●●●●●**	**91**
TOCA Race Driver 2	Codemasters	●●●●	86
Tokyo Xtreme Racer 3	Crave	●●	76
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	●●◖	45
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubisoft	●●●◖	65
⚡Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	**Ubisoft**	**●●●◖**	**78**
⚡Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	●●●●	80
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	●●●●◖	68
⚡Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Chaos Theory	**Ubisoft**	**●●●●●**	**92**
⚡Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow	**Ubisoft**	**●●●●●**	**82**
Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	**Eidos**	**●●**	**72**
⚡Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	**Activision**	**●●●●●**	**51**
⚡Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	**Activision**	**●●●●●**	**63**
⚡Tony Hawk's Underground	**Activision**	**●●●●●**	**76**
⚡Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	●●●●◖	87
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⚡Tribes: Aerial Assault	Sierra	●●●◖	62
Triple Play 2002	EA Sports	●●	55
Triple Play Baseball	EA Sports	●●	45
⚡Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged	Atari	●●	81
True Crime: Streets of L.A.	**Activision**	**●●**	**76**
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Twisted Metal: Black	**Sony CEA**	**●●●●●**	**47**
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UEFA Euro 2004	EA Sports	●●●●◖	82
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Under the Skin	Capcom	●●●◖	86
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The Urbz: Sims in the City	EA Games	●●●◖	88
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Vampire Night	Namco	●●◖	52
Van Helsing	Vivendi Universal	●●●◖	82
Vexx	Acclaim	●●	67
Victorious Boxers	Empire	●●●◖	51
⚡Vietcong: Purple Haze	Global Star	●◖	88
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	●●●●◖	85
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Virtua Fighter 4	**Sega**	**●●●●●**	**55**
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	**Sega**	**●●●●●**	**72**
Virtua Quest	Sega	●●	89
Virtual on Marz	Sega	●●	76
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	●●●●◖	70
Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	Bam	●●●	74
War Jetz	3DO	●●◖	48
War of the Monsters	**Sony CEA**	**●●●●●**	**64**
⚡Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	THQ	●●◖	74
Warriors of Might and Magic	3DO	●●◖	44
Wave Rally	Eidos	●◖	53
Way of the Samurai	Bam	●●●◖	59
Way of the Samurai 2	Capcom	●●●	82
Wheel of Fortune	Atari	●●◖	76
Whiplash	Eidos	●●●◖	76
Whirl Tour	Vivendi Universal	●●	63
Whiteout	Konami	●	65
Wild Arms 3	Sony CEA	●●●◖	62
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Wipeout Fusion	Bam	●●●●◖	57
Wizardry: Tale of the Forsaken Land	Atlus	●●●	53
Woody Woodpecker: Buzz Buzzard Park	DreamCatcher	●●●	57
⚡World Championship Poker	Crave	●◖	90
⚡World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco	●●●◖	76
World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks	3DO	●●●	42
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World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega Sports	●●●●	67
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 6 Int'l	**Konami**	**●●●●●**	**67**
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 7 Int'l	**Konami**	**●●●●●**	**78**
⚡World Soccer: Winning Eleven 8 Int'l	Konami	●●●●◖	90
World Tour Soccer 2002	Sony CEA	●●●●	53
World Tour Soccer 2003	Sony CEA	●●●●	65
⚡World Tour Soccer 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	80
⚡World Tour Soccer 2006	Gathering	●●	91
Worms Forts: Under Siege	Sega	●●●	92
Wrath Unleashed	LucasArts	●◖	78
WRC: World Rally Championship	**Bam**	**●●●●●**	**57**
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions	Activision	●●	63
WTA Tour Tennis	Konami	●	57
WWE Crush Hour	THQ	●●◖	68
WWE SmackDown! Here Comes the Pain	**THQ**	**●●●◖**	**76**
WWE SmackDown! Just Bring It	**THQ**	**●●●◖**	**52**
WWE SmackDown! Shut Your Mouth	**THQ**	**●●◖**	**64**
⚡WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw	THQ	●●●◖	88
X Squad	EA Games	●●●◖	38
The X-Files: Resist or Serve	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	81
X-Men Legends	Activision	●●●●	87
X-Men: Next Dimension	Activision	●●●	64
X2: Wolverine's Revenge	Activision	●●●	69
Xenosaga Episode I: DWZM	Namco	●●●●	66
Xenosaga Episode II: JVGUB	Namco	●●●◖	90
XGRA: Extreme-G Racing Association	Acclaim	●●●●◖	74
⚡XIII	Ubisoft	●●●◖	75
Yanya Caballista: City Skater	Koei	●●●◖	49
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Yu-Gi-Oh! The Duelists of the Roses	Konami	●●◖	67
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	Konami	●●●	88
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	Atari	●●◖	88
Zapper	Infogrames	●●◖	64
ZOE: Zone of the Enders	Konami	●●●●◖	44
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	●●●●◖	68

READER REVIEWS

SOME THINGS ARE WORTH FIGHTING FOR

TEKKEN 5

WHAT YOU SAID

"I must admit that I've been a *Tekken* fan ever since *Tekken 3* came out. The fighting mechanics were, to me, golden. I played it nonstop and then snatched my copy of *Tekken Tag* when it hit stores for the PS2 launch. *Tekken 4* was a bit of a disappointment, so now, I'm happy as hell that *Tekken*'s back to the way it was. Sure, I have a few problems, one being the final boss, Jinpachi; he's just so corny and cheap. But the way that each character crosses paths with the others is awesome, especially for the new characters. So what if it's a lot like the previous installments? Every fighting game is like that. The Devil Within bonus game didn't need to be included (I could've gone with more arenas instead), online would've been nice, and some characters seem a bit too powerful (e.g., Paul, Ganryu). I don't care, though, it's still the best hand-to-hand combat game I've ever played, and certainly the best looking."

[●●●●◖]

Devon Jones

WHAT WE SAID

"*Tekken 5* is great because it not only refines the wall-attack system and other skills like counters, but also remains totally accessible to even the most novice fighting-game fans."

[●●●●○]

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK: FILE #2

WHAT YOU SAID

"What do I think of *Resident Evil Outbreak: File #2*? I think Capcom screwed up so bad that I would rather play with the shelf the game was on than the actual game! One would think that after Capcom got praised for making *RE4*, the company would go with it, but no—it spit out a game that has online capabilities but doesn't use them to the fullest. Here is how my online session went: I played with Kevin, Yoko, and Mark. Whoever was playing as Kevin kept trying to hit me, and I could not tell him to stop because I can't communicate, so when he asked for help, I let him get killed. Meanwhile, Mark and Yoko went wandering off, so I was all alone and got killed. After that one session, I calmly stood up, drove to Blockbuster, and traded this game for *GTA3*."

[●○○○○]

Darkcovey@aol.com

WHAT WE SAID

"The challenge comes from trying to figure out how to play the game instead of from the game itself. In other words: lazy design. Raccoon City has seen its fair share of horrors over the years, but few are quite as abominable as this."

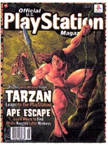
[●◖○○○]

REWIND

OPM THROUGH THE YEARS

THE SAGA CONTINUES

OPM is just six issues away from #100. Continuing with last month's theme, we're taking a look at issues #23 through #33. With the PS2 launching in Japan, the PS1 scene was already starting to wind down, as evidenced by the largely ho-hum selection of titles you see here for review and preview. But the PS1 still had its moments—here are some of them.


Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
TARZAN
APE ESCAPE

ISSUE #23: AUGUST 1999

Cover story: *Tarzan*
Reviewed: *R-Type Delta* (4.5/5), *Chocobo Racing* (4/5), *Echo Night* (3/5)
Previewed: *Suikoden II, Sled Storm, Medal of Honor, Omega Boost*
Biggest technological feat: George Lucas reveals that the then-unreleased PS2 is considerably more powerful than the computers used to create the effects for *The Phantom Menace.*

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
Final Fantasy VIII

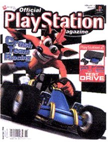
ISSUE #24: SEPTEMBER 1999

Cover story: *Final Fantasy VIII*
Reviewed: *Driver* (4/5), *WWF Attitude* (4/5), *UmJammer Lammy* (3.5/5)
Previewed: *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions, Wipeout 3, Wu Tang: Shaolin Style*
Most unreasonably optimistic quote: "Forget about the record—the upcoming *Final Fantasy* movie really looks like it's going to be good, dammit!"

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
Spyro 2
50

ISSUE #25: OCTOBER 1999

Cover story: *Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage*
Reviewed: *Final Fantasy VIII* (5/5), *Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver* (4.5/5), *Dino Crisis* (4/5)
Previewed: *Crash Team Racing, Rainbow Six*
Most inspiring quote: "Creativity is not a resource; it's a muscle. It's not something that you use up; it's something that, the more you use it, the stronger it gets." —*Spyro* composer (and Police drummer) Stewart Copeland


Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
Crash Team Racing
PlayStation 2
TEST DRIVE

ISSUE #26: NOVEMBER 1999

Cover story: *Crash Team Racing*
Reviewed: *Crash Team Racing* (5/5), *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* (4.5/5), *Wipeout 3* (4/5)
Previewed: *GTA2, Fear Effect, Resident Evil 3*
Most exciting moment: Seeing the PS2 for the first time. A quote from the article: "The design is familiar, yet unlike any current console or PC. Notice the rich blue in the logo and vertical stand, symbolic of water and Earth." Er, yeah.

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
60 GAMES REVIEWED
Tricks
PLAYSTATION2
DINO CRISIS STRATEGY

ISSUE #27: DECEMBER 1999

Cover story: *PlayStation 2*
Reviewed: *GTA2* (3/5), *Rainbow Six* (1/5), *Medal of Honor* (4/5), *Resident Evil 3* (4.5/5)
Previewed: *Tekken Tag Tournament, Dark Cloud, The Bouncer, Onimusha*
Most Zen quote: "Just like human genes, different kinds must coexist while a species tries to evolve." —Hideo Kojima on the impending next-generation hardware battle

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
GT2
FULL SCOOP
BUYER'S GUIDE
REVIEWS

ISSUE #28: JANUARY 2000

Cover story: *Gran Turismo 2*
Reviewed: *Twisted Metal 4* (4/5), *Tomorrow Never Dies* (3.5/5), *Shadow Tower* (.5/5)
Previewed: *Tomba! 2, SaGa Frontier 2*
Oddest space allocation: Ten pages for "The End of the World Survival Guide," in which we spun Y2K fears into a comprehensive buyers' guide. Meanwhile, a measly four pages were given to the cover game, *Gran Turismo 2.*

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
FIRST LOOK:
SMACK! DOWN
The New King of the Ring?

ISSUE #29: FEBRUARY 2000

Cover story: *WWF SmackDown!*
Reviewed: *Gran Turismo 2* (5/5), *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation* (4/5), *Tomba! 2* (4/5)
Previewed: *Ace Combat 3, Syphon Filter 2*
Most unfortunate timing: In the wake of the Columbine school shootings, Capcom elects to remove support for light guns from *Resident Evil Survivor*—a game that was designed to be controlled by a light gun. The game tanks.

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
GT2
EXCLUSIVE
Syphon Filter 2
PREVIEW AND DEMO
OPM AWARDS
30

ISSUE #30: MARCH 2000

Cover story: *Syphon Filter 2*
Reviewed: *Hot Shots Golf 2* (3.5/5), *Marvel vs. Capcom EX* (2.5/5), *Road Rash: Jail Break* (2/5)
Previewed: *Front Mission 3, Deception III*
Most embarrassing moment: *Gran Turismo 2* fans discover, as they dive deep into the game, that it's unfinished: Players can achieve only 98.2% completion. Sony issues an apology and re-presses the game with the bug fixed.

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
STAR TREK Invasion
$9.99 PS GAMES
FEAR EFFECT
FINAL FANTASY 9, 10, 11

ISSUE #31: APRIL 2000

Cover story: *Star Trek: Invasion*
Reviewed: *Syphon Filter 2* (3.5/5), *Fear Effect* (4.5/5), *Front Mission 3* (4.5/5)
Previewed: *Driving Emotion Type-S, Midnight Club, Fantavision, Vagrant Story*
Most surprisingly cordial quote: "We don't think [the Xbox] will be our rival. If Microsoft thinks we are their rival, that would be an honor." —Ken Kutaragi, "father of PlayStation"

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
HUGE STRATEGY
SYPHON FILTER 2
20 new previews
Tekken Tag Tournament leads the
PlayStation 2 assault from Japan

ISSUE #32: MAY 2000

Cover story: *Tekken Tag Tournament*
Reviewed: *MediEvil II* (3.5/5), *Gauntlet Legends* (2.5/5), *Alundra 2* (3/5)
Previewed: *Spider-Man, X-Men: Mutant Academy, Wild Arms 2, Mr. Driller*
Most hyperbolic quote: "It's historic, a mass-market appliance that fundamentally changes society the way the printing press did." —3DO CEO Trip Hawkins on the PS2

10 Pages of Tricks and Tips
Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
X-MEN
The Movie
The Comics
The Games
The Demo!
Over 60 Previews:

ISSUE #33: JUNE 2000

Cover story: *X-Men*
Reviewed: *Vagrant Story* (3.5/5), *Star Wars: Jedi Power Battles* (2.5/5), *Wild Arms 2* (3.5/5)
Previewed: *The Legend of Dragoon, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2, The Getaway*
Most carefully noncommittal quote: "*The Getaway* certainly looks pretty incredible if these early screens are to be believed." Yeah, well...they weren't.

ADVERTISER INDEX

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